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THE  
TRUE SPOUSE OF JESUS CHRIST,  
OR  
THE NUN SANCTIFIED

BY THE VIRTUES OF HER STATE.

BY  
SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN,  
BY A CATHOLIC CLERGYMAN.

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## THE AUTHOR'S NOTICE.

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THIS work, as appears from the title, is intended particularly for Nuns. However, only a small portion of it is directed exclusively to them; the remainder, but especially what regards the observance of the vows of religion, regular discipline, and the perfection of the religious state, is equally suited to Religious of all denominations; and what regards the Christian virtues, will be found highly useful even for Seculars.

To each chapter I have annexed prayers replete with pious affections, knowing that such prayers are very acceptable to Religious who seek perfection. For, as St. Denis, the Areopagite says, "divine love consists in the

affections of the heart, more than in the knowledge of the understanding." In human sciences, knowledge excites love ; but, in the science of the saints, love produces knowledge. He that loves God most, knows Him best. Besides, it is not lofty and fruitless conceptions, but works that unite the soul to God, and make her rich in merits before the Lord.

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From the preceding table of contents, it is evident, that this work, with the exception of one or two chapters, is adapted to Seculars as well as to Religious.



"THE TRUE SPOUSE OF JESUS CHRIST."—This work has been translated into German ; many editions of it have been published in that language, as well as in the Italian. It is regarded as a complete collection of all the author has written, in his various works, on religious perfection.—*Life of Blessed Liguori, by M. Jeancard, Missionary of Provence, published in Lyons, 1820, p. 566.*

THE  
TRUE SPOUSE OF JESUS CHRIST.

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CHAPTER I.

*On the excellence of virginity consecrated to  
God, in the religious state.*

1. Virgins who have the happiness of dedicating themselves to the love of Jesus Christ, by consecrating to him "the lily" of their purity are, in the first place, as dear to God as his Angels. "They shall," says the Redeemer, "be like the Angels of God in heaven." (Matt. 22. 30.) Such is the immediate fruit of the virtue of chastity. Hence, St. Ambrose says, that "whoever preserves this virtue is an Angel, and that whoever violates it is a demon." (St. Am. lib. de offic.) Baronius relates (anno 490 num. 23 in comp.) that when a certain virgin called Georgia, was

on the point of death, a great multitude of doves were seen hovering about her; that, when her body was brought to the Church, they flew to that part of the roof which corresponded with the place of the corpse, and remained there till after the interment. By all who saw them, these doves were regarded as Angels paying respect and homage to the body of the virgin. Chastity is justly styled an angelic and celestial virtue. Because, says St. Ambrose, this virtue has ascended even to the heavens, and thence taken an example to be imitated on earth; and because, in heaven, the residence of its spouse, it is practised in all its perfection. (Lib. de virg.)

2. Besides, whoever consecrates her virginity to Jesus Christ, becomes his spouse. "I have," says St. Paul, "espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. xi. 2.) I have promised to present to Jesus Christ your souls as so many chaste spouses. The Redeemer, whenever he speaks of virgins, calls himself their spouse, but when he speaks of others, he calls himself Master, Pastor or Father. Hence that elegant verse of St. Gregory Nazianzen, "and chaste virginity is adorned by Christ her spouse." These espousals are perfected in faith. "And I will espouse thee to me in faith." (Osee. 2. 20.) Jesus Christ has in a special manner, merited for mankind the gift of virginity, and is therefore followed

by virgins whithersoever he goeth. (Apoc. 14. 4.) The Mother of God once said to a certain virgin, that a religious ought to have a great esteem for all virtues, but that purity, by which she is principally assimilated to her divine spouse, should hold the first place in her heart. St. Antony of Padua says that though, according to St. Bernard, all just souls are spouses of the Saviour, still, virgins consecrated to God are his spouses in a special manner. Hence St. Fulgentius calls Jesus Christ the only spouse of all consecrated virgins. (St. Fulg. Ep. 3. cap. 4.)

3. A young person desirous of settling in the world, will, if she be prudent, in the first place, carefully inquire into the circumstances and dispositions of all who pretend to her affections, and will diligently seek to ascertain who of these is most deserving of her heart; and from whom she may expect the greatest happiness? A religious, on the day of her profession, is espoused to Jesus Christ. For, in the ceremony of profession, the Bishop says to the Novice about to be professed—“*I espouse thee to Jesus Christ; may he preserve thee inviolate. Receive, then, as his spouse, the ring of faith, that, if thou serve him with fidelity, he may give thee an eternal crown.*” Let us, then, ask the spouse of the canticles, who is this divine bridegroom? Tell me, O sacred spouse, what are the qualities of thy beloved, the only object of thy affection, who

renders thee the happiest of women? "What manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, O thou most beautiful among women?" (Can. 5. 9.) She will answer: "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." (Can. 5. 10.) My beloved is rendered white by his innocence, and ruddy by the ardour with which he loves his spouses. In a word, he is so loving, so perfect in all virtues, and, at the same time, so courteous and affable, that he is of all spouses the most dear and amiable. "There is nothing," says St. Eucherius, "more glorious, nothing more beautiful, nothing more magnificent than he is." "These happy virgins, then," says St. Ignatius, Martyr, "who are consecrated to Jesus Christ, may be assured that they have obtained the most beautiful, the most noble, the most opulent, and most amiable spouse that can be found in heaven or on earth." (St. Ign. mart. Epis. ad Antioch.)

4. Hence, blessed Clare, of Montefalco, used to say that her virginity was so dear to her, that, rather than lose it, she would be content to suffer the pains of hell during her whole life. Hence, as we learn from St. Ambrose, the glorious virgin St. Agnes, when offered for husband the son of the Roman Prefect, justly answered, that she had found a better spouse. Saint Domitilla the Emperor's niece, through a love of virginity refused the hand of Count Aurelian: and, when it was

argued that she might lawfully marry him, because, although a Gentile, he would allow her to remain a Christian, she replied: *If, to a young woman, were offered the choice of a monarch or a peasant, which would she prefer? If I marry Aurelian, I must renounce the nuptials of the King of heaven; and would not that be the extreme of folly? You may, therefore, tell the Count that I cannot accede to his proposal.* Thus, she preserved her virginity which she had consecrated to Jesus Christ; and, rather than prove unfaithful to her Divine spouse, she suffered to be burned alive by her barbarous lover. The holy virgin St. Susanna made a similar reply to the Emperor Dioclesian, who offered her the title of Empress, on the condition that she would marry his son-in-law Maximin whom he had created Cæsar. In punishment of her refusal she was rewarded with the crown of martyrdom. Many other holy virgins have declined the nuptials of earthly Monarchs, to become the spouses of Jesus Christ. Thus, blessed Jane the Infanta of Portugal refused the hand of Louis the eleventh king of France. Blessed Agnes, that of the emperor Ferdinand the second, and Elizabeth the daughter and heiress of the king of Hungary, rejected the proposal of marriage with the Archduke of Austria.

5. Besides, whoever consecrates her virginity to Jesus Christ, is devoted entirely to God, in body as well as in mind. "The un-

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married woman," says St. Paul, "and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord; that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband."

(1. Cor. vii. 34.) Virgins consecrated to God, think only of God, and desire only to belong to him without reserve; but married persons, being of the world, can think of nothing but of things of the world. Hence, the Apostle adds; "and this I speak for your profit: not to cast a snare upon you, but for that which is decent, and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord, without impediment." (ibid. iii. 35.) Thus, poor worldlings meet with insurmountable difficulties, in the way of virtue; and, the more exalted their rank, the greater the obstacles to their sanctification.

6. To become a saint in the world, it is necessary for the married woman to adopt the means of sanctification, to frequent the sacraments, to make long and frequent mental prayer, to practice many interior and exterior mortifications, to love contempt, humiliations and poverty, and, in a word, to make every effort in her power to please God. She must, then, be perfectly detached from the world, and all its goods, and perfectly free from the control and tyranny of human ties. But, how can a married person find the time, the opportunities, and helps necessary for recollection, and continual application to the things of God?

"She that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how to please her husband." The married woman must provide for her family, educate her children, please her husband, his parents, brothers and relations, who are sometimes to her a constant source of trouble. Hence, the Apostle says, her heart must be divided, and her affections fixed partly on her husband, partly on her children, and partly on God. What time can she have for continual prayer, for frequent communion, when with all her efforts, she is not able to attend to the wants of the house. The husband must be attended, if his directions be neglected, or his commands be not immediately executed, he breaks out into complaints and reproaches. The servants disturb the house, at one time, by their clamour, or their quarrels, at another, by their importunate demands. The children, if small, are a perpetual source of annoyance either by their cries and screams, or by the endless variety of their wants; if grown up, they are an occasion of still greater inquietude, fears and bitterness, by associating with bad companions, by the dangers to which they are exposed, or the infirmities with which they are afflicted. How, in the midst of so many difficulties and embarrassments, is it possible for the married woman to attend to prayer, or to preserve recollection? And, as to her communions, they can scarcely be as frequent as once a week. She may indeed have strong desires



of sanctification; but, to pay attention to the affairs of her soul, will be morally impossible. The very privation of the opportunities of attending to the things of God may be made a source of great merit by patient submission to the Divine will, in the unhappy state in which she is placed. All this is indeed possible: but, to practice patience and resignation, in the midst of so many troubles and distractions, without the aid of prayer, or of spiritual reading, or of the sacraments, will be exceedingly difficult and almost impracticable.

7. But, would to God, that seculars were exposed to no other evils, than the obstacles to their devotions, to constant prayer, and the frequent use of the sacraments. Their greatest misfortune is to be in continual danger of losing the grace of God and their own immortal souls. They must appear like their equals, they must employ servants, and support their rank. They must go abroad to visit their friends, and, in these visits, they must converse with a variety of characters. At home, they must hold constant intercourse with their own families, with their relatives, and with the friends of their husband. Oh! how great, on such occasions, is the danger of losing God? This is not understood by young persons, but, it is well known to those who are settled in the world, and who are daily exposed to such dangers.

8. Oh how unhappy and miserable is the life of the generality of married persons! I have known the circumstances, the feelings, and dispositions of numberless married persons, from the highest to the lowest classes of society; and, how few of them were content! The bad treatment of husbands, the disaffection of children, the wants of the family, the control of relatives, the pains of childbirth, which are always accompanied with danger of death, the scruples and anxiety of conscience regarding the flight of occasions, and the education of children, plunge poor seculars into endless troubles and agitation, and fill their souls with continual regret for not having been called to a happier and more holy state. God grant that, in the midst of such troubles and agitation, many of them may not lose their immortal souls, and that, along with passing through a hell in this life, they may not be condemned to an eternity of torments in the next. Such is the unhappy condition of many of those who have engaged in the married state. But you will ask are there no saints among so many thousands of married persons? I answer, that there are some who sanctify themselves in the world, by suffering a continual martyrdom, by bearing, for God's sake, all crosses and troubles with patience and with cheerfulness, and by peacefully and lovingly offering themselves in all things to God. There are some who

attain this high degree of perfection: but they are like the white flies. And you will find that such holy souls are always employed in works of penance, and that they continually aspire after the sanctity and disengagement of those who have consecrated their virginity to Jesus Christ, devoted their lives to the glory of God, and have embraced a state of constant happiness.

9. The state, then, of virgins consecrated to Jesus Christ, and who are entirely devoted to his divine love, is, of all states, the most happy and sublime. They are free from the dangers to which married persons are necessarily exposed. Their affections are not fixed on their families, nor on men of the world, nor on goods of the earth, nor on the dress and vanities of women. To appear like their equals, and to please their husbands, married persons must wear rich apparel and costly ornaments: but, a virgin consecrated to Jesus Christ only requires a garment which will cover her body. In her, vanity of dress, or the decoration of her person, would be a scandalous exhibition. Besides, consecrated virgins are not troubled with the cares of a house, a family and a husband; their sole concern, the only desire of their hearts is to please Jesus Christ, to whom they have dedicated their souls and bodies, and all their affections. They are unshackled by worldly ties, by subjection to friends or to relatives, and are far removed from the noise

and tumult of the world. Hence, they have more time, and better opportunities for prayer, spiritual reading, and frequent communion. Their minds are more free to think on the affairs of their soul, and to practise recollection and union with God. "For" says Theoderet, "she that is a virgin has her mind free from useless thoughts." A religious, then, has no other occupation than to hold constant and familiar converse with God. Ecumenius, in his commentary on the words of St. Paul, "that she may be holy both in body and in spirit," says "that her body is sanctified by chastity, and her spirit by familiarity with God." Saint Anselm says that in the mere exemption from the cares of the world, to think on the things of the Lord, virgins receive an abundant compensation for all their temporal sacrifices. (St. Anse. in 1 Cor. 7.) Hence, the saint adds, that virgins consecrated to God, not only shall receive great glory in heaven, but, shall be also rewarded beforehand, by the enjoyment of continual peace, on earth. (loc. cit.)

10. Religious who aspire to perfection, are the beloved of Jesus Christ: because, they have consecrated to him their bodies and their souls, and seek nothing in this life, but to do his holy will. St. John, because he was a virgin, was called the beloved disciple of Jesus: "whom Jesus loved." (John xiii, 23.) Hence, in the divine office, we read of him, that "he

was chosen, a virgin, by the Lord, and of all the Apostles was the most beloved." (Resp. noct. 1.) Virgins are called the first fruits of God. "For," says St. John, "they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God, and to the Lamb." (Apoc. xiv. 4.) But why are virgins called the first fruits of God? Because, says Cardinal Hugo, in his commentary on the preceding passage, as first fruits are the most delicious, so virgins consecrated to God, are most pleasing and dear to him.

11. The spouse in the canticles, "feedeth among the lilies." (Can. ii, 16.) One of the sacred interpreters, explaining these words, says, that "as the devil revels in the uncleanness of lust, so Christ feeds on the lilies of chastity." Venerable Bede asserts that the hymn of the virgins is more agreeable to the Lamb, than that of all the other saints. (Bed. in Apoc. xiv. 4.) So great is the excellence of virginity, that the Holy Ghost says, "no price is worthy of a continent soul." Hence Cardinal Hugo teaches that, in the other vows, a dispensation is sometimes granted, but not in the vow of chastity; because such is the value of continence, that its loss cannot be compensated. The price of chastity may be estimated by the answer of Mary to the Archangel Gabriel: "How shall this be done, because I know not man." (Luke, i, 34.) By these

words, she showed her readiness to renounce the offered dignity of Mother of God, rather than forfeit her virginal integrity.

12. St. Cyprian says that "virginity is the queen of all virtues, and the possession of every good." (S. Cy. de virgin.) Speaking of virginity, St. Ephrem says, "if you have loved it, you will be favoured by the Lord in all things." (S. Eprn. de virt. cap. 9.) St. Bernardine of Sienna teaches that "virginity prepares the soul to see her spouse Jesus by faith in this life, and by glory in the next." Oh, what an immense weight of glory is prepared for those who dedicate their virginity to Jesus Christ. The Redeemer shewed to that great servant of God, Lucretia Orsini, the sublime dignity to which consecrated virgins are raised in heaven. In the vision, she exclaimed, "Oh how dear are virgins to God and to Mary." Theologians teach that virgins are honoured in heaven with a special crown of glory and of joy. "And no man," says St. John, "could say the canticle, but those hundred and forty-four thousand, who were purchased from the earth." (Apoc. 14, 3.) St. Augustine explaining this passage, says, "that the joys of the virgins are not given to the other saints of God."

13. But, to be the virginal spouse of Jesus Christ, it is not sufficient to be a virgin; it is necessary to be a prudent virgin, and to carry a lamp always filled with oil, that is, a heart

inflamed with the love of God. The foolish virgins were indeed virgins ; but, because their lamps were extinguished, they were shut out from the marriage, and were told by the bridegroom that he knew them not. A virgin, then, who wishes to be a true spouse of the Redeemer, ought to desire and seek nothing, but to love and please Jesus Christ. " If," says St. Bernard, " he becomes a spouse, he will change his language and say : If I am a spouse, where is my love ? God requires to be feared as a master, to be honoured as a father, and to be loved as a spouse." (Ser. 83, in Cant.)

14. To be a faithful lover of Jesus Christ her spouse, and to preserve unsullied the lily of her purity, a virgin must adopt the necessary means. The principal means of acquiring an ardent love of Christ, are prayer, communion, mortification, retirement. Although each of these means is fully discussed in another part of this work, still a brief notice of them in this place, will not be irrelevant. The first means to love Jesus Christ, is mental prayer. Mental prayer is that blessed furnace, in which the soul is inflamed with divine love. " And, said holy David, in my meditation a fire shall flame out." In temptations against purity, the immediate invocation of the Divine aid is absolutely necessary. The venerable sister Cecilia Gastelli used to say that, without prayer, chastity cannot be preserved. " As I knew," said Solomon, " that I could not otherwise be

continent, except God gave it, I went to the Lord and besought him with my whole heart.” (Wis. viii, 21.) The second means is the holy communion. This, says St. Bonaventure, is the cellar of wine into which the king of heaven brings his spouses “to set in order charity” in their hearts, teaching them to love God above all things, and their neighbours as themselves. The third means is mortification. “As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters.” (Cant. 2, 2.) As the lily blooms among the thorns, so virginity is preserved in the midst of mortification. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to say that “chastity flourishes only among thorns.” To fulfil the obligations of the Religious state, in the midst of amusements, worldly attachments, and conversations with seculars, in the midst of sensual gratifications, of indulgence of the palate, of the eyes, and of the ears, is utterly impossible. Religious purity can be preserved only among the thorns of mortification. “A virgin,” says St. Basil, “should be immaculate in all things, in the tongue, the ears, the eyes, the touch, and above all, in the mind.” (S. Bas. de vera virg.) To be faithful to her spouse, a virgin must be immaculate in her tongue by the delicacy of her language, and by abstinence as much as possible from conversations with men; she must be immaculate in the ears, by shunning like death itself, all worldly discourses; immaculate in her eyes by the modesty of her



looks, always restrained so as never to fix them on the face of a man; immaculate in the touch, always observing the greatest caution towards herself and others, but above all, immaculate in her soul, rejecting every unchaste thought, as soon as it is presented to the mind, by invoking the assistance of Jesus and Mary. As a queen tempted by a negro slave, contemptuously turns away without condescending to notice him, so the spouse of Jesus Christ should reject, with disdain and horror, every immodest thought which intrudes itself into the mind. To preserve her soul and body free from stain, she must also chastise her flesh, by fasting, abstinence, by disciplines and other penitential works. And if she have not health or strength to practise such mortifications, she ought, at least, to bear in peace, her infirmities and pains, and to accept cheerfully the contempt and ill treatment she receives from others. The spouse follows the lamb whithersoever he goeth. (Apoc. 14. 4.) Jesus Christ has not walked before us in the way of pleasures, and honors; no, he has chosen the rugged path of pains and opprobrium. Hence, many holy virgins have loved sufferings and contempt, and have joyfully encountered torments and death.

15. The fourth means is retirement. "Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtle doves." (Cant. 1. 9.) The spouse in the canticle is compared to the turtle; because, the turtle avoids the company of other birds, and delights in soli-

tude. A religious appears beautiful in the eyes of Jesus Christ, only in retirement and at a distance from the society of men. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzis was accustomed to say that chastity is a plant which thrives only in enclosed gardens, and in the midst of thorns. A religious should observe not only the enclosure of the convent, but also that of the senses; and, therefore, unless compelled by duty, or by obedience, she should never approach the door, the grate, or the windows. "Jesus," says St. Jerome in his Epistle to Eustochia, "is a jealous spouse: he is unwilling that your face be seen by others." The Saviour, then, is greatly displeased with the conduct of those who seek to appear before seculars, and delight in their conversation. Virgins, distinguished for sanctity, always seek retirement; and whenever it is necessary to go into the company of men, they endeavour to deform their persons, so as to excite feelings of aversion, rather than sentiments of affection. Bollandus relates, that St. Andregesina, a virgin, besought the Almighty to change her beauty into deformity. Her prayer was heard, and she was instantly covered with a leprosy, which made her an object of horror to all who beheld her. James, of Vibriaco, (in Spec. Exemp. 19,) says that St. Euphemia, to free herself from the attention of a person who was greatly attached to her, cut off her nose and lips, saying, "vain beauty, you shall be no longer an

occasion of sin to me." St. Antonine relates, and Baronius (anno 670, Num. 39, 6,) confirms his narration, that St. Ebba, abbess of the convent of Collingamens, fearing an invasion of the barbarians, cut off her nose and upper lip, and that all other nuns, amounting to thirty in number, followed her example. The barbarians came, and, seeing the religious so deformed, set fire to the convent and burned them alive. The church has placed all these holy virgins in the catalogue of her martyrs. It would not be lawful for others to imitate the heroic conduct of these saints: *they* acted from an impulse of the Holy Ghost. But, from their example, religious may learn how much virgins, inflamed with the love of Jesus Christ, shun the company, and despise the esteem and affections of men. A religious should conceal herself as much as possible from the view of men. At her espousals with Jesus Christ, she renounced the world and all its vanities. Such is the compact which she made with him, when, in answer to the question—" *Do you renounce this world and all its vanities?*"—she answered—" *I renounce them.*" St. Jerome, in his eighth epistle to Demetria, says: "Now, since you have left the world, fulfil your solemn engagements, and do not conform to this world."

16. If you desire to possess the purity which becomes the spouse of Jesus, you must cut off all dangerous occasions: you must

cherish a holy ignorance of all that is opposed to chastity, and abstain from reading whatever has the slightest tendency to sully the soul. If, at the grate, language unbecoming your state be ever uttered, you should instantly withdraw, or change the subject of conversation, otherwise, you shall have much to suffer from the temptations by which you will be assailed. If fire does not always burn, it never fails to scorch. A look, an endearing expression, or a trifling gift, often enkindles a spark which soon becomes an infernal, a consuming fire. In all that regards purity too much caution cannot be observed. Trust not in your own strength; believe one who has known a thousand cases in which that sublime virtue was lost by exposure to danger. If you say, *I will expose myself so far, and no farther*, be assured, that, before you perceive your danger, you will be plunged into the precipice. If, in voluntary perils, you have hitherto escaped ruin, thank God for your preservation, but tremble for the future. Saints have retired into the deserts to preserve the virtue of chastity: and will you rush into unnecessary danger? It is particularly difficult for those who are in the vigour of youth, to practice immaculate purity, while they converse with young men on wordly subjects, jesting with them, and smiling at expressions which ought to cover them with shame. Fly, fly from all such occasions. Explain to the confessor, not only

your temptations, but also the occasions of them, and ask his advice about the best means of removing them.

17. The day on which a virgin is espoused to Jesus Christ, is to him a day of great joy. "Go forth," he says in the canticles, "ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem, wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, and the day of the joy of his heart." (Cant. iii. 11.) Yes, the day on which a religious consecrates her virginity to Jesus Christ, is to him a day of triumph and exultation, provided she dedicates her whole being to his love and glory, and prepares herself, in a becoming manner, for her espousals with the God of holiness. On such days, the Redeemer calls on all Paradise to rejoice with him. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory to him: for the marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath prepared herself." (Apoc. xix. 7.) The ornaments which the lamb requires in his spouses, are the virtues recommended in the Gospel, but particularly charity and purity. "He will make thee chains of gold inlaid with silver." (Cant. i. 10.) These chains of gold, inlaid with silver, signify the virtues of charity and chastity. These, as we learn from St. Agnes, are the garments and jewels, with which the lamb decorates his spouse. "He surrounded my right hand and my neck with precious stones. The Lord clothed me with a garment of golden texture,

and adorned me with immense necklaces.”  
(Resp. in Festo. S. Agn. 21, Jan.)

18. Seculars direct all their attention to the things of the world; but the spouses of Jesus Christ seek God, and God alone. Of religious it is written—“This is the generation of them that seek him.” (Ps. xxiii. 6.) These holy virgins, whom you see confined within their convent, poor and humble, are the generation of blessed souls, who seek nothing on this earth but God’s glory. “You, then, O consecrated virgins,” says St. Thomas of Villanova, “should contend with each other, not about the pre-eminence of your birth, the superiority of your talents, nor the amplitude of your fortunes; but for the first place in the esteem and affections of Jesus Christ, and for the highest claim to familiarity with him, to humility and obedience.” St. Jerome, in one of his letters to Eustochia, who wished to consecrate her virginity to Jesus Christ, writes: “Since, my child, you are coming to the service of God, the Holy Ghost admonishes you to stand in justice, and to prepare your soul for temptation; to practice patience in humility: for gold is tried in the fire. No one can serve two masters. You will, therefore, despise the world, and, espoused to Christ, you will sing, the Lord is my portion for ever.” (Epis. 22, ad. Eust.) Religious, on the day of profession, change their names, to shew that on that day they die to the world, to live to

Christ, who died for them. All Christians should, according to St. Paul, die to themselves, and live only to Jesus Christ. "And Christ died for all: that they also, who live, may not now live to themselves; but unto him who died for them and rose again." (2 Cor. v. 15.) But, if all do not attend to the instructions of the Apostle, religious, at least, who are the chosen spouses of the Redeemer, should fulfil them. The venerable Sister, Frances Farnese, regarded the remembrance of being the spouses of Jesus Christ, as the most powerful means of exciting her religious to fervour and perfection. It is certain, she would say to them, that, since you have been raised to the dignity of his spouses, God has chosen each of you to be a saint.

19. St. Augustine, writing to a religious, says—"O happy virgin! if you know not your dignity, endeavour to estimate its excellence by the doctrine of the saints. You have the most beautiful of spouses, who, by selecting you from among thousands, and making you his spouse, has given you a pledge of affection, from which you may learn how ardent should be your love for him." (Tom. 9, de Dil. Dei cap. iv. 4.) And St. Bernard, in his fortieth sermon on the Canticle of Canticles, addressing consecrated virgins, says—"Have nothing to do with the world: forget all things: reserve yourself for the Lord, whom, from among all things, you have cho-

sen for your inheritance." Cease, O spouse of Jesus, to think of yourself, or of the world : you belong no longer to yourself, or to the world, but to that God, to whom you are consecrated. Forget all things, and attend to him only who has chosen you for his spouse. "Your God," continues the Saint, "has chosen you ; and how many have been cast away, who could not obtain the grace which has been bestowed on you ? Your Redeemer and your Spouse has preferred you before all these ; not because you were more worthy ; but because he loved you more than them." (Ibid.) You have not chosen God, but God has first chosen you for his spouse. How many has he left in the world who could not obtain the dignity to which you have been raised. He has chosen you in preference to them : he has called you to his tabernacle, not because you had superior claims, but because his love for you was greater than his love for them. The Saint then concludes : " Wherefore, saith the Lord ; ' behold, thy time is the time of lovers.' Reflecting, then, upon these things, in your soul, place all your hope and affection in Jesus, your spouse, who has loved you in perpetual charity, and in mercy has drawn you to himself." (Ibid.)

20. Whenever, then, O spouse of Jesus, the world solicits your affection, answer in the words of St. Agnes : " Depart from me food of death ; I am already espoused to another



lover." All the affections of my heart shall be reserved for my God, who has loved me before I could love him. A religious, when she receives the veil on the day of profession, makes use of similar language. "He has placed," she says, "a sign on my forehead, that I may admit no lover but him. My spouse has covered my face with this veil, that not seeing, and not being seen, I may have no lover but Jesus. St. Jerome exhorts religious to take a holy pride in this exalted dignity of spouses of the Redeemer. "Learn," he says, "O spouse of God, a holy pride. Know that you are raised above worldlings, and say: I have found him whom my soul sought: I will hold him, and will not let him go." (Ep. 22.) Seculars glory in their nuptials with men of rank and fortune; but you, who are the spouse of the King of heaven, can boast of better espousals. Say, then, with pride and with joy: I have found the object of my affections; I will embrace him with love, and will not permit him to depart from me. It is love that unites the soul with God. "But above all things," says St. Paul, "have charity, which is the bond of perfection." (Col. iii. 14.)

21. Sublime, indeed, is the dignity of virgins: each of them can glory and say—"I am espoused to him whom the Angels serve." He, to whom the celestial spirits ardently desire to minister, is my spouse; with his own ring he has pledged me, and with a crown has adorned

me as his own spouse. My Creator, the Sovereign of the universe, has espoused me, and, conferring upon me a crown, has raised me to the dignity of a queen. But, O sacred virgin, remember that, while you remain on earth, this crown is not eternal, and that by your negligence it may be lost. "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Apoc. iii. 11.) Hold fast your crown, that no one may be able to snatch it from you; disengage yourself from all affection to creatures; unite yourself more and more every day to Jesus Christ, by love, by prayer, and by continual supplication that he will never suffer you to abandon him. "Jesus, my spouse, never permit me to be separated from you." And, when creatures seek to take possession of your heart, and to banish the Son of God from your soul, trust in the divine aid, and say with the Apostle—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Neither life, nor death, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. viii.)

#### PRAYER.

O Jesus, my Saviour, and my God, how have I merited this singular favour, that, while you have left in the world so many innocent souls, you should have chosen me, a sinner, for your spouse, to live in your own house here on earth, that I might afterwards receive

from you an eternal crown in heaven? O Lord, since you have bestowed upon me so great a grace, grant me light to understand its value, and strength to be always grateful for it, and, with my whole soul, to correspond with the love which you have borne to me. You have chosen me, in preference to many others: it is my duty to prefer you to all. You have given yourself entirely to me: it is but just that I present my whole being to you, and that you be the sole object of all my love, and of all my affections. Yes, my Jesus, I love you above all things: I desire to love you alone. You have given yourself to me without reserve: I offer myself entirely to you. I beseech you to accept this oblation, and not to refuse the affections of a heart that once loved creatures, and even preferred them before you, the sovereign good. Accept and preserve my soul and body. Without your assistance I can do nothing: without it, I shall certainly betray you. Since you have chosen me for your spouse, make me a faithful and grateful spouse. O sacred fire, burning in the heart of Jesus, inflame my soul, and destroy in my heart, every affection which is not for him; make me live only to love this my amiable Spouse, who has given his life to be loved by me. O Mary, mother of God, since I am the spouse of your Son, you are not only my queen, but my mother. And, since it was by your intercession that I have been detached from the world,

conducted into this house of God, and made the spouse of your Son, assist me now, and do not abandon me for ever. Grant that my life and death may be worthy the spouse of Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER II.

### *On the advantages of the religious state.*

WELL may the words of the Canticle of Moses and of the children of Israel, after their delivery from the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the bondage of Egypt, be applied to religious : “In thy mercy thou hast been a leader to the people which thou hast redeemed, and in thy strength thou hast carried them to thy holy habitation.” (Exod. xv. 13.) As the Hebrews compared with the Egyptians were, in the old law, the beloved people of God, so religious, contrasted with seculars, are, in the new law, the chosen spouses of the Saviour. As the Hebrews went forth from Egypt, a land of labour and of slavery, where God was not known, so religious retire from the world, which gives to its servants no other recompense than pains and bitterness, and in which the name of God is continually blasphemed. Finally, as the Hebrews in the desert were guided by a pillar of fire to the land of promise, so the spouses of Jesus are conducted, by the light of the Holy Spirit, into the sanctuary of religion—the bright image of the promised land

of heaven. In heaven, there is no selfwill; no thirst for earthly riches, or for sensual pleasures; and from the cloister, these pernicious desires, by means of the holy vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity, are effectually excluded. In heaven, to praise God is the constant occupation of the saints, and in religion, every action of the community is referred to the glory of his name. "You praise God," says St. Augustine, "by the discharge of every duty; you praise him when you eat or drink; you praise him when you rest or sleep." (St. Aug. in Ps. 146.) You, O sacred virgin, praise the Lord by regulating the affairs of the convent, by assisting in the sacristy, at the *turn*, or at the gate;—you praise the Lord when you go to table; you praise him when you retire to rest and sleep; you praise him in every action of your life. Lastly, in heaven, the saints enjoy continual peace; because there, they find in God the source of every good; and, in religion, where God alone is sought, in him is found that peace which surpasses all understanding, and that content which the world cannot give. Well, then, might St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzis say, that the spouse of Jesus should have a high esteem and veneration for her holy state; since, after baptism, a vocation to religion is the greatest grace which God can bestow. You, then, should hold the religious state in higher estimation than all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth. In

that holy state you are preserved from sins, which you would commit in the world; there you are constantly occupied in holy exercises; there you meet every day with numberless opportunities of meriting an eternal crown. In this life, religion makes you the spouse of a God, and, in the next, will raise you to the rank of queen, in the eternal kingdom of his glory. How did you merit to be called to that holy state, in preference to so many others who had stronger claims than you? Black, indeed, must be your ingratitude, if, for the benefit of your vocation, you do not thank God every day with all the affections of your soul. The advantages of the religious state cannot be better described than in the words of St. Bernard: "Is not that a holy state in which a man lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is bedewed more frequently, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purged more quickly, and rewarded more abundantly?" (St. Ber. de Bono. rel.) Let us examine these advantages separately, and meditate on the great treasures which each of them contains.

3. 1.—"Vivit purius"—"A religious lives more purely." Surely all the works of religious are, in themselves, most pure and acceptable before God. Purity of action consists principally in purity of intention, or in a pure motive of pleasing God. Hence, our actions will be agreeable to God in proportion to their

conformity to his holy will, and to their freedom from the corruption of selfwill. The actions of seculars, even the most fervent, partake more of selfwill than those of religious. Seculars pray, communicate, hear mass, read, take the discipline, and recite the divine office when they please. But, a religious performs these duties at the time prescribed by obedience—that is, by the holy will of God. For, in her rule, and in the commands of her superior, she hears his voice. Hence, a religious, by obedience to her rule and to her superior, merits an eternal reward, not only by her prayers, and by the performance of her spiritual duties, but also by her labours, her recreations, and attendance at the *turn*; by her meals, her amusements, her words, and her repose. For, since the performance of all these duties is dictated by obedience, and not by selfwill, she does in each the holy will of God, and by each, she earns an everlasting crown.

4. Oh! how often does selfwill vitiate the most holy actions? Alas! to how many, on the day of judgment, when they shall ask, in the words of Isaias, the reward of their labours—"Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded?—have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?"—to how many, I say, will the Almighty Judge answer—"Behold, in the day of your fast, your own will is found." (Isa. lviii. 3.) What! he will say, do you demand a reward? Have you



not, in doing your own will, already received the recompense of your toils? Have you not, in all your duties, in all your works of penance, sought the indulgence of your own inclinations, rather than the fulfilment of my will? The Abbot Gilbert, (ser. 871,) says, the meanest work of a religious is more meritorious in the sight of God, than the most heroic action of a secular. St. Bernard asserts, (Ser. 4 in Ps. Qui habitat,) that, if a person in the world did the fourth part of what is ordinarily done by religious, she would be venerated as a saint. And has not experience shewn, that the virtues of many, whose sanctity shone resplendent in the world, faded away before the bright examples of the fervent souls, whom, on entering religion, they found in the cloister? A religious, then, because, in all her actions, she does the will of God, can truly say that she belongs entirely to him. The venerable M. Mary of Jesus, foundress of the convent of Tolosa, used to say, that, for two reasons, she entertained a high esteem for her vocation; first, because a religious enjoys the society of Jesus Christ, who, in the holy sacrament, dwells with her in the same habitation; secondly, because a religious having by the vow of obedience sacrificed her own will, and her whole being to God, she belongs unreservedly to him.

5. 2—"Cedit rarius"—"A religious falls more rarely." Religious are certainly less

exposed to the danger of sin than seculars. Almighty God represented the world to St. Antony, and before him to St. John the Evangelist, as a place full of snares. Hence, that holy Apostle said, that in the world there is nothing but the "concupiscence of the flesh," or of carnal pleasures; "the concupiscence of the eyes," or of earthly riches; "and the pride of life," or worldly honours, which swell the heart with petulance and pride. In religion, by means of the holy vows, these poisoned sources of sin are cut off. By the vow of chastity, all the pleasures of sense are for ever abandoned; by the vow of poverty, the desire of riches is perfectly eradicated; and, by the vow of obedience, the ambition of empty honours is utterly extinguished.

6. It is, indeed, possible for a Christian to live in the world without any attachment to its goods; but, it is difficult to dwell in the midst of pestilence, and to escape the contagion. "The whole world," says St. John, "is seated in wickedness." (John, 1 Ep. v. 19.) St. Ambrose, in his comment on this passage, says, that they who remain in the world, live under the miserable and cruel despotism of sin. The atmosphere of the world is noxious and pestilential: whosoever breathes it easily catches spiritual infection. Human respect, bad example, and evil conversations, are powerful incitements to earthly attachments, and to estrangement of the soul from God. Every

one knows that the damnation of numberless souls is attributable to the occasions of sin so common in the world. From these occasions, religious, who live in the retirement of the cloister, are far removed. Hence, St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzis, was accustomed to embrace the walls of her convent, saying—"O blessed walls, from how many dangers do you preserve me!" Hence, also, blessed Mary Magd. of Orsini, whenever she saw a religious laugh, used to say: "Laugh and rejoice, dear Sister, for you have reason to be happy, being far away from the dangers of the world."

7. "Surgit velocius"—"A religious rises more speedily." If a religious should be so unfortunate as to fall into sin, she has the most efficacious helps to rise again. Her rule which obliges her to frequent the holy sacrament of penance; her meditations, in which she is reminded of the eternal truths; the good examples of her saintly companions; and the reproofs of her superiors, are strong incentives to rise from her fallen state. "Woe," says the Holy Ghost, "to him that is alone: for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up."—(Eccles. iv. 10.) If a secular forsake the path of virtue, he seldom finds a friend to admonish and correct him, and is, therefore, exposed to great danger of persevering and dying in his sins. But, in religion, "if one fall, he shall be supported by the other." (Ibid.) If a religious commit a fault, her companions assist

her to correct and repair it. "She," says St. Thomas, "is assisted by her companions to rise again."

8. "A religious walks more cautiously." Religious enjoy far greater spiritual advantages than the first princes or monarchs of the earth. Kings, indeed, abound in riches, honours, and pleasures: but no one will dare to correct their faults, or to point out their duties. All abstain from alluding to their defects, through fear of incurring their displeasure: and, to secure their esteem, many even go so far as to applaud their vices. But, if a religious go astray, her error will be instantly corrected; her superiors and companions in religion will not fail to admonish her, and to point out her danger: and even the good example of her sisters will remind her continually of the transgression into which she has fallen. Surely a Christian, who believes that eternal life is the one thing necessary, should set a higher value upon these helps to salvation, than upon all the dignities and riches of the earth.

9. As the world presents to seculars innumerable obstacles to virtue, so the cloister holds out to religious continual preventives of sin. In religion, the great care which is taken to prevent light faults, is a strong bulwark against the commission of grievous transgressions. If a religious resist temptations to venial sin, she merits by that resistance additional strength to conquer temptations to

mortal sin. But if, through frailty, she sometimes yields to them, all is not lost: the evil is easily repaired. Even, then, the enemy does not get possession of her soul: at most, he only succeeds in taking some unimportant outpost from which he may be easily driven; while, by such defeats, she is taught the necessity of greater vigilance, and of stronger defences against future aggressions; she is convinced of her own weakness; and, being humbled and rendered diffident of her own powers, she recurs more frequently and with more confidence to *Jesus Christ and his holy mother*. Thus, from these falls, the religious sustains no serious injury, since, as soon as she is humbled before the Lord, he stretches forth his all-powerful arm to raise her up. "When he shall fall, he shall not be bruised, for the Lord putteth his hand under him." (Ps. xxxvi. 24.) On the contrary, such victories over her weakness contribute to inspire greater diffidence in herself, and greater confidence in God. Blessed Egidius, of the order of St. Francis, used to say, that one degree of grace in religion is better than ten in the world; because, in religion it is easy to profit of grace, and hard to abuse it; while, in the world, grace fructifies with difficulty, and is lost with facility.

10. 5—"A religious is bedewed more frequently." Oh! God, with what internal illuminations, spiritual delights, and expressions

of love, does Jesus refresh his spouses, at prayer, communion, in presence of the holy sacrament, and in the cell, before the crucifix ! Christians in the world are like plants in a barren land, on which but little of the dew of heaven falls, and from that little, the soil, for want of proper cultivation, seldom derives fertility. Poor seculars ! They desire to devote more time to prayer, to receive the holy eucharist, and to hear the word of God more frequently ; they long for greater solitude, for more recollection, and a more intimate union of their souls with God. But, temporal affairs, human ties, visits of friends, and restraints of the world, place these means of sanctification beyond their reach. But religious are like trees planted in a fruitful soil, which is continually and abundantly watered with the dews of heaven. In the cloister, the Lord continually comforts and animates his spouses, by infusing interior lights and consolations during the time of meditation, sermons and spiritual lectures, and even by means of the good example of their sisters. Well, then, might mother Catherine of Jesus, of the holy order of St. Teresa, say, when reminded of the labours she had endured in the foundation of a convent—“God has rewarded me abundantly by permitting me to spend one hour in religion, in the house of his holy mother.”

11. 6—“A religious rests more securely.”  
Worldly goods can never satisfy the cravings

of the human soul. The brute creation, being destined only for this world, are content with the goods of the earth; but, being made for God, man can never enjoy happiness except in the possession of the Divinity. The experience of ages proves this truth: for, if the goods of this life could content the heart of man, kings and princes who abound in riches, honours, and carnal pleasures, should spend their days in pure unalloyed bliss and felicity. But, history and experience attest, that they are the most unhappy and discontented of men; and that riches and dignities are always the fertile sources of fears, of troubles, and of bitterness. The emperor Theodosius entered one day, unknown, into the cell of a solitary monk, and, after some conversation, said: "Father, do you know who I am? I am the emperor Theodosius." He then added: "*Oh! how happy are you, who lead here on earth a life of contentment, free from the cares and woes of the world. I am a sovereign of the earth; but, be assured, father, that I never dine in peace.*"

12. But how can the world—a place of treachery, of jealousies, of fears, and commotions, give peace to man? In the world, indeed, there are certain wretched pleasures which perplex rather than content the soul; which delight the senses for a moment, but leave lasting anguish and remorse behind. Hence, the more exalted and honourable the

rank and station a man holds in the world, the greater is his uneasiness, and the more racking his discontent: for, earthly dignities, in proportion to their elevation, are accompanied with cares and contradictions. We may, then, conclude, that the world, in which the heart-rending passions of ambition, avarice, and the love of pleasures, exercise a cruel tyranny over the human race, must be a place not of ease and happiness, but of inquietude and torture. Its goods can never be possessed in such a way, that they may be had in the manner, and at the time, we desire their possession: and, when enjoyed, instead of infusing content and peace into the soul, they drench her with the bitterness of gall. Hence, whosoever is satiated with earthly goods, is saturated with wormwood and poison.

13. Happy, then, the religious who loves God, and knows how to estimate the favour which he bestowed upon her in calling her from the world and placing her in religion, where, conquering by holy mortification her rebellious passions, and practising continual self-denial, she enjoys that peace, which, according to the Apostle, excels all the delights of sensual gratification: "The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding." (Phil. iv. 7.) Find me, if you can, among those seculars on whom fortune has lavished her choicest gifts, or even among the princes of the earth, a soul more happy or content than a



religious divested of every worldly affection, and intent only on pleasing God? She is not rendered unhappy by poverty, for she preferred it before all the riches of the earth; she has voluntarily chosen it, and rejoices in its privations; nor by the mortification of the senses, for she entered religion to die to the world and to herself; nor by the restraints of obedience, for she knows that the renunciation of selfwill is the most acceptable sacrifice she could offer to God. She is not afflicted at her humiliations, because it was to be despised that she came into the house of God. "I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the tabernacles of sinners." (Ps. lxxxiii. 11.) The enclosure is to her rather a source of consolation than of sorrow, because it frees her from the cares and dangers of the world. To serve the community, to be treated with contempt, or to be afflicted with infirmities, does not trouble the tranquillity of her soul, because she knows that all these make her more dear to Jesus Christ. Finally, the observance of her rule does not interrupt the joy of a religious; because the labours and burdens which it imposes, however numerous and oppressive they may be, are but the wings of the dove with which she flies to be united and at rest with her God. Oh! how happy and delightful is the state of a religious, whose heart is not divided, and who can say with St. Francis: "My God, and my all."

14. It is true, that, even in the cloister, there are some discontented souls : for, even in religion, there are some who do not live as religious ought to live. To be a good religious, and to be content, are one and the same thing : for, the happiness of a religious consists in a constant and perfect union of her will with the adorable will of God. Whosoever is not united to him cannot be happy : for God cannot infuse his consolations into a soul that resists his divine will. I have been accustomed to say that a religious, in her convent, enjoys a foretaste of Paradise, or suffers an anticipation of hell. To endure the pains of hell, is to be separated from God ; to be forced against the inclinations of nature, to do the will of others ; to be distrusted, despised, reprov'd, and chastised, by those with whom we live ; to be shut up in a place of confinement, from which it is impossible to escape : in a word, it is to be in continual torture without a moment's peace. Such is the miserable condition of a bad religious ; and therefore she suffers on earth an anticipation of the torments of hell. The happiness of Paradise consists in an exemption from all care and uneasiness ; in the conversations of the saints ; in a perfect union with God, and the enjoyment of continual peace. A perfect religious possesses all these blessings, and therefore receives in this life a foretaste of Paradise.

15. The perfect spouses of Jesus have, in-

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deed, their crosses to carry here below: for this life is a state of merit, and consequently of suffering. The inconveniencies of living in community are burdensome; the reproofs of superiors, and the refusals of permission, galling; the mortification of the senses painful; and the contradiction and contempt of companions intolerable to self-love. But, to a religious, who desires to belong entirely to God, all these occasions of suffering are so many sources of consolation and delight: for she knows, that, by embracing pain, she offers a sweet odour to God. St. Bonaventure says, that the love of God is like honey which sweetens every bitter. The venerable Cæsar de Bustis addressed a nephew, who had entered religion, in the following words: "My dear nephew, when you look at the heavens, think on Paradise: when you see the world, reflect on hell, where the damned endure eternal torments without a moment's enjoyment: when you behold your convent, remember purgatory, where many just souls suffer in peace and with a certainty of eternal life." And what more delightful than to suffer (if suffering it can be called) with a tranquil conscience?—than to suffer, in favour with God, and with an assurance, that every pain will one day become a gem in an everlasting crown? Ah! the brightest jewels in the diadems of the saints, are the sufferings which they endured, in this life, with patience and resignation.

16. Our God is faithful to his promises, and grateful beyond measure. He knows how to remunerate his servants, even in this life, by interior sweetness, for the pains which they patiently suffer for his sake. Experience shews that religious, who seek consolation and happiness from creatures, are always discontented, while they who practice the greatest mortifications enjoy continual peace. Let us, then, be persuaded, that neither pleasures of sense, nor honours, nor riches, nor the world with all its goods, can make us happy. God alone can content the heart of man : whoever finds him, possesses all things. Hence, St. Scholastica said, that if men knew the peace which religious enjoy in retirement, the entire world would become one great convent ; and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzis used to say, that they would abandon the delights of the world, and force their way into religion. Hence, also, St. Lawrence Justinian says, that “God has designedly concealed the happiness of the religious state ; because, if it were known, all would relinquish the world and fly to religion.”

17. The very solitude, silence, and tranquillity of the cloister, give to a soul, that loves God, a foretaste of Paradise. Father Charles of Lorena, a Jesuit of royal extraction, used to say, that the peace which he enjoyed during a single moment, in his cell, was an abundant remuneration for the sacrifice he had made in quitting the world. Such was the happiness

which he occasionally experienced in his cell, that he would sometimes exult and dance with joy. Blessed Seraphina of Ascoli, a Capuchin, was in the habit of saying, that he would not give one inch of his cord for all the kingdoms of the earth. Arnolf, a Cistercian, comparing the riches and honours of the court which he had left, with the consolations which he found in religion, exclaimed—"How faithfully fulfilled, O Jesus, is the promise which you made of rendering a hundred fold to him who leaves all things for your sake." St. Bernard's monks, who led lives of great penance and austerities, received in their solitude such spiritual delights, that they were afraid they should obtain, in this life, the reward of their labours. Let it be your care to unite yourself closely with God; to embrace with peace all the crosses he sends you; to love what is most perfect; and, when necessary, to do violence to yourself. And, that you may be able to accomplish all this, pray continually; pray in your meditations, in your communions, in your visits to the blessed Sacrament, and especially when you are tempted by the devil; and you shall obtain a place in the number of those fervent souls, who are more happy and content than all the princesses, and queens, and empresses of the earth.

18. Beg of God to give you the spirit of a perfect religious—that spirit which impels the soul to act, not according to the dictates of

nature, but according to the motions of grace, or from the sole motive of pleasing God. Why wear the habit of a religious, if, in heart and soul, you be a secular, and live according to the maxims of the world? Whosoever profanes the garb of religion, by a worldly spirit and a worldly life, has an apostate heart. "To maintain," says St. Bernard, "a secular spirit under the habit of religion, is apostacy of heart." (Ser. v. Ps. xc.) The spirit of a religious, then, implies an exact obedience to the rules, and to the directions of the superior, along with a great zeal for the interests of religion. Some religious wish to become saints, but only according to their own caprice—that is, by long silence, prayer, and spiritual reading, without being employed in any of the offices of the community. Hence, if they are sent to the *turn*, to the gate, or to other distracting occupations, they become impatient; they complain, and sometimes obstinately refuse to obey, saying, that such offices are to them occasions of sin. Oh! such is not the spirit of a religious: surely, what is conformable to the will of God cannot hurt the soul. The spirit of a religious requires a total detachment from commerce with the world; great love and affection for prayer, for silence, and for recollection; ardent zeal for exact observance; deep abhorrence of sensual indulgence; intense charity towards all men; and finally, a love of God capable of subduing and of ruling all the

passions. Such is the spirit of a perfect religious. Whosoever does not possess this spirit, should, at least, desire it ardently; should do violence to herself, and earnestly beg God's assistance to obtain it. In a word, the spirit of a religious supposes a total disengagement of the heart from every thing which is not God, and a perfect consecration of the soul to him, and to him alone.

19. 7—"A religious dies more confidently." Some are deterred from entering religion by the apprehension, that their abandonment of the world might be afterwards to them a source of regret. But, in making choice of a state of life, I would advise such persons to reflect not on the pleasures of this life, but on the hour of death, which will determine their happiness or misery for all eternity. And, I would ask, if, in the world, surrounded by seculars; disturbed by the fondness of children from whom they are about to be separated for ever; perplexed with the care of their worldly affairs, and disturbed by a thousand scruples of conscience; they can expect to die more contented than in the house of God, assisted by their companions who continually speak of God, who pray for them, and console and encourage them in their passage to eternity? Imagine you see, on the one hand, a princess dying in a splendid palace, attended by a retinue of servants, surrounded by her husband, her children, and relations, and represent to

yourself, on the other, a religious expiring in her convent, in a poor cell, mortified, humble; far from her friends, stripped of property and selfwill; and tell me, which of the two, the rich princess or poor nun, dies most contented? Ah! the enjoyment of riches, of honours, and pleasures in this life, do not afford consolation at the hour of death, but rather beget grief and diffidence of salvation; while poverty, humiliations, penitential austerities, and detachment from the world, render death sweet and amiable, and give to a Christian strong hopes of attaining that true felicity which shall never terminate.

20. Jesus Christ has promised that whosoever leaves his house and relatives, for God's sake, shall enjoy eternal life. "And every one that hath left house or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or lands, for my sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting." (Mat. xix. 29.) A certain religious, of the society of Jesus, being observed to smile on his death-bed, some of his brethren who were present began to apprehend that he was not aware of his danger, and asked him why he smiled? He answered: "Why should I not smile, since I am sure of Paradise? Has not the Lord himself promised to give eternal life to those who leave the world for his sake? I have long since abandoned all things for the love of him: he cannot violate his own promises. I smile, then, be-



cause I confidently expect eternal glory." The same sentiment was expressed long before by St. John Chrysostom writing to a certain religious : " God," says the Saint, " cannot tell a lie. But he has promised eternal life to those who leave the goods of this world. You have left all these things ; why then should you doubt the fulfilment of his promise ?" (St. Chry. lib. de Prov.)

21. St. Bernard says, that " it is very easy to pass from the cell to heaven ; because, a person who dies in the cell scarcely ever descends into hell, since it seldom happens, that a religious perseveres in her cell till death, unless she be predestined to happiness." (St. Ber. trac. de vita solit.) Hence, St. Lawrence Justinian says, " that religion is the gate of Paradise ; because, living in religion, and partaking of its advantages is a great mark of election to glory." No wonder, then, that Gerard, the brother of St. Bernard, when dying in his monastery, began to sing with joy and gladness. God himself says : " Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." (Ap. xiv. 13.) And surely, religious who, by the holy vows, and especially by the vow of obedience, or total renunciation of selfwill, die to the world and to themselves, must be ranked amongst the number of those who " die in the Lord." Hence, Father Suarez, remembering, at the hour of death, that all his actions in religion were performed through obedience, was filled with

spiritual joy, and exclaimed, that he could not imagine death could be so sweet and so full of consolation.

22. 8—"A religious is purged more quickly." St. Thomas teaches, that the perfect consecration which a religious makes of herself to God, by her solemn profession, remits the guilt and punishment of all her past sins. "But," he says, (2. 2 qu. ult. a 3, ad. 5,) "it may be reasonably said, that a person, by entering into religion, obtains the remission of all sins. For, to make satisfaction for all sins, it is sufficient to dedicate one self entirely to the service of God by entering religion, which dedication exceeds all manner of satisfaction. Hence," he concludes, "we read in the lives of the Fathers, that they who enter into religion, obtain the same grace, as those who receive baptism:" and consequently, religious, by their profession, merit the remission of the temporal punishment due to their sins. The defects committed, after profession, by a good religious, are expiated in this world, by her daily exercises of piety, by her prayers, communions, and mortifications. But, if a religious should not make full atonement in this life for all her sins, her purgatory will not be of long duration. The many sacrifices which are offered for her after death, and the prayers of the community, will soon release her from suffering.

23. 9—"A religious is more abundantly

rewarded." Worldlings are blind to the things of God ; they do not comprehend the happiness of eternal glory, in comparison of which the pleasures of this world are but wretchedness and misery. If they had just notions, and a lively sense of the glory of Paradise, they would assuredly abandon their possessions—even kings would abdicate their crowns—and, quitting the world, in which it is exceedingly difficult to attend to the one thing necessary, they would retire into the cloister to secure their eternal salvation. Bless, then, dear Sister, and continually thank your God who by his own lights and graces has delivered you from the bondage of Egypt and brought you to his own house ; prove your gratitude by fidelity in his service, and by a faithful correspondence with so great a grace. Compare the goods of this world with the eternal felicity which God has prepared for those who leave all things for his sake, and you will find, that there is a greater disparity between the transitory joys of this life and the eternal beatitude of the saints, than there is between a grain of sand and the entire creation.

24. Jesus Christ has promised, that whosoever shall leave all things for his sake, shall receive a hundred fold in this life, and eternal glory in the next. Can you doubt his words ? Can you imagine that he will not be faithful to his promise ?— Is he not generous beyond measure in rewarding the most trifling actions ?

If they who give a cup of cold water, in his name, shall not be left without abundant remuneration, (St. Mark, ix. 40,) how great and incomprehensible must be the reward which a religious, who aspires to perfection, shall receive for the numberless works of piety which she performs every day?—for so many prayers, offices, and spiritual lectures?—for so many acts of mortification and of divine love which she daily refers to God's honor? Do you not know that these good works which are performed through obedience, and in compliance with the religious vows, merit a far greater reward than the good works of seculars? Brother Lacci, of the society of Jesus, appeared after death to a certain person, and said that he and king Philip the second were crowned with bliss, but that his own glory as far surpassed that of Philip, as the exalted dignity of an earthly sovereign is raised above the lowly station of an humble religious.

25. The dignity of martyrdom is sublime ; but the religious state appears to possess something still more excellent. The martyr suffers that he may not lose his soul : the religious, to render herself more acceptable to God. A martyr dies for the faith : a religious for perfection. Although the religious state has lost much of its primitive splendour, we may still say, with truth, that the souls who are most dear to God, who have attained the greatest perfection, and who edify the church by the

odour of their sanctity, are, for the most part, to be found in religion. How few are there in the world, even amongst the most fervent, who rise at midnight to pray and sing the praises of God? How few who spend five or six hours each day in these or similar works of piety?—who practise fasting, abstinence, and mortification? How few who observe silence, or accustom themselves to do the will of others rather than their own? And, surely, all these are performed by the religious of every order : even in convents where the discipline is most relaxed, many are found, who, on the day of judgment, will condemn the others, who aspire to perfection, observe the rules, and perform, in private, many works of supererogation. It is evident that the conduct of the generality of Christians in the world cannot be compared with that of good religious. No wonder, then, that St. Cyprian called virgins, consecrated to God, “the flower of the garden of the church, and the noblest portion of the flock of Jesus Christ.” St. Gregory Nazianzen says, that religious “are the first fruits of the flock of the Lord, the pillars and crown of faith, and the pearls of the church.” I hold, as certain, that the greater number of the seraphic thrones, vacated by the unhappy associates of Lucifer, will be filled by religious. Out of the sixty, who, during the last century, were enrolled in the catalogue of saints, or honoured with the appellation of *Blessed*, all, with the exception

of five or six, belonged to the religious orders. Jesus Christ once said to St. Teresa : " Wo to the world, but for religious." (Riber. Lib. 1, vit. c. 12.) Ruffinus says: "It cannot be doubted, that the world is preserved from ruin by the merits of religious." (Ruffin. Prol. in vita Patri.) When, then, the devil affrights you by representing the difficulty of observing your rule, and practising the self-denial and the austerities necessary for salvation, raise your eyes to heaven, and the hope of eternal beatitude will give you strength and courage to suffer all things. The trials, mortifications, and miseries of this life, will soon be past, and to them will succeed the ineffable delights of Paradise, which shall be enjoyed for eternity without fear of failure or of diminution.

#### PRAYER.

O God of my soul, I know that you most earnestly desire to save me. By my sins I had incurred the sentence of eternal condemnation ; but, instead of casting me into hell, as I deserved, you stretched forth your loving hand, and not only delivered me from hell and sin, but you have also drawn me, as it were by force, from amidst the dangers of the world, and placed me in your own house amongst your own spouses. I hope, O my Spouse, to be admitted one day into heaven, there to sing for eternity the great mercies you have shewn me. Oh ! that I had never offended you. O

Jesus, assist me, now that I desire to love you with my whole soul, and wish to do every thing in my power to please you. You have done every thing you could do to gain my love: it is but just that I devote my entire being to your service. You have given yourself entirely to me: I give myself without reserve to you. Since my soul is immortal, I desire to be eternally united to you. And, if it is love which unites the soul with you, I love you, O my Sovereign good; I love you, my Redeemer; I love you, O my Spouse, my only treasure and object of my love: I love you, and hope that I shall love you for eternity. Your merits, O my Redeemer, are the grounds of my hope. In your protection, also, O great mother of God, my mother Mary, do I place unbounded confidence. You obtained pardon for me when I was in the state of sin: now that I hope I am in the state of grace, and am a religious, will you not obtain for me the grace to become a saint? Such my ardent hope, my fervent desire. Amen.

## CHAPTER III.

*A religions should belong entirely to God.*

PLUTARCH relates, (Quest. Rom. 49;) that in Rome it was the duty of a woman, on her first arrival at the house of her husband, to address him in the following words: "Wherever you are, there also shall I be. Wheresoever your will leads you, there likewise my desires shall carry me." It is this perfect conformity of her will with his, that Jesus Christ demands of every virgin who aspires to the dignity and glory of his spouse. "My son," he says, "give me thy heart." (Prov. xxiii. 26.) My child, and my spouse, what I desire from you is, that you give me your heart, your affections, and your will. The Holy Ghost says, that "when God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, he set his eye upon their hearts." (Eccl. xvii. 7.) He fixed his eyes not upon their hands, but upon their hearts; because external works are of no value before God, unless they proceed from the heart, and be accompanied by the affections of the soul. All the glory of the spouse of Christ consists in an entire and perfect union of her soul with



God. "All the glory of the King's daughter is within." (Ps. xlv. 14.) This union of her interior makes a religious belong entirely to the Lord.

2. "God," says Bernard, "requires to be feared as a Master, to be honoured as a Father, and to be loved as a Spouse." (Ser. 83, in Cant.) Hence, in his virginal spouses, the Redeemer bears more patiently with every imperfection than with a divided heart, or a want of love. It was to shew the necessity of a complete and unqualified dedication of themselves to his glory, that he ordained, by his church, that, in receiving the sacred veil on the day of their profession, his spouses should be reminded of their obligation to reject every other lover. "Receive," the Bishop says, "the veil, that you may admit no lover but him." Receive this veil, that you may no longer have regard to creatures, and that you may banish from your heart every affection which is not for God. The church commands religious, at their profession, to change their name, that they may forget the world; that they may esteem themselves dead to all earthly things; and that the dispositions of their souls may correspond with the words which they utter on that solemn occasion: "The empire of the world, and all the grandeur of the earth, I have despised for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ, whom I have seen, whom I have loved, in whom I have believed, towards whom my

heart inclineth." I have despised the world and all its pomps, for the sake of Jesus, my Spouse, to whom, because he is most amiable and most worthy of my love, I have consecrated all the affections of my heart. Every religious should say to the world, with St. Agnes: "Depart from me, food of death, for I am pledged to another lover." Whenever any earthly object steals into her heart, and claims a share in that love which had been entirely consecrated to her Divine Spouse, she should exclaim: "Begone pernicious affection, you seek to poison my heart: depart, therefore, for another lover more noble, more faithful, and more acceptable than you, has loved me before I could love him, and has taken possession of my whole soul: you are a vile and miserable creature; but my Spouse is the Lord, the King of heaven and earth. I am espoused to him whom the Angels serve."

3. Without love the soul of man cannot exist. Her affections must be fixed on God or on creatures: if she love not creatures, she will certainly love God. Hence, the Holy Ghost exhorts us to guard our hearts with the utmost vigilance against all affections which have not God for their object: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." (Prov. iv. 23.) While the heart loves God, the soul shall have life; but if the heart transfer its affections to creatures, spiritual death will be the inevitable

consequence. In order, then, to become a saint, the spouse of the Lamb must expel from her soul whatsoever has not God for its end and object. When any one demanded admission into the society of the Fathers of the desert, they answered him by the following question: "Do you bring a vacant heart, that it may be filled by the Holy Ghost?" Justly did they require a soul detached from earthly goods: for, a heart in which the world dwells cannot be replenished with the love of God. Whoever bring to the fountain a vessel replete with sand, will labour in vain to fill it with water, unless it be first emptied of its contents. O my God, why do so many religious frequent the holy exercises of prayer and communion, and draw from them so little increase of divine love? It is because their hearts are so full of the world, of self-esteem, of vanity, of selfwill, of affection to friends, and attachment to creatures. Until the world is rooted out of their hearts, the love of God cannot take possession of their souls. Give me a religious who is detached from the world and the things of the world, and I pledge myself that divine love shall abound in her soul. To obtain this detachment from the earth it is necessary to call continually on the Lord in the language of holy David: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." (Ps. 50.) Give me, O Lord, a heart free from every affection which does not proceed from the love of thee. "Wo to them that are of a

double heart." (Eccl. ii. 14.) "Wo," says St. Augustine in his comment on these words, "to them who divide their heart, giving it partly to God, and partly to the devil." (De subst. dilec. num. 4.) For, continues the Saint, the anger of God is justly provoked against those who treat him and his sworn enemy with equal attention, and therefore he departs from them, and yields to the devil the undivided possession of their hearts. "God is angry, because in the affections of a double heart he is associated with the devil: he departs, and the devil possesses the whole." (Ibid.) The holy Doctor then concludes, that, because a soul loves God less in proportion as her affections are fixed on other objects, a religious cannot be entirely devoted to the love of her Spouse, while she is attached to creatures. "He loves you less who loves any thing else with you." (Ibid.)

4. In a word, every little attachment to created objects impedes the perfect consecration of the soul to God. St. Teresa, while she cherished an irregular though not an unchaste affection for a relative, was but imperfectly united to God; but, disengaging her heart from all earthly attachments, she consecrated her whole soul to the love of Jesus, and merited to hear from him: "Teresa, now thou art all mine, and I am all thine." St. Joseph Calasancius used to say, that a religious who gives not to Jesus her whole heart, gives him no-

thing. His assertion was most just : for, it is impossible to divide a heart, too small to love a God who deserves infinite love, and to give one part of it to him and another to creatures. "No," says blessed Egidius, "the soul which is one must be entirely given to him who is one, who merits all our love, and who has done and suffered so much to extort our love." "Surely," observes Father Nierembergh, "it was not necessary for our redemption that Jesus Christ should have submitted to all the miseries, and endured all the pains of his life and death. A single drop of his blood, a tear, a prayer, would have been sufficient to save the whole world and an infinite number of worlds. But the Son of God has shed the last drop of his blood, and has given his life not only to redeem us, but also to compel us to love him with our whole hearts. He could have sent an Angel to deliver us from sin ; 'but,' says Hugh of St. Victor, 'lest you should divide your love between the Creator and the redeeming Angel, he who was your Creator has chosen to become your Redeemer.'" (In lib. Sent.)

5. The Lord commands all to love him with their whole heart. To each one he says : "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart." (Mat. xxii. 37.) This precept of love is especially directed to the spouses of the Redeemer. A brother in religion said once to the venerable Father John Joseph of Alcantara, that he had become a religious to save

his soul. The venerable Father replied : "My child, do not say that you have left the world to secure your salvation ; say rather that you have entered religion to become a saint : for the object of a religious should be to love God in the highest degree." O my God, if a religious love not Jesus Christ with her whole soul, to whom will she give the preference in her heart ? Oh ! how many marks of predilection must he have shewn to you in making you his spouse in religion ? He must, first, have selected you for creation from among an infinite number of possible beings. Then, to make you from your birth a child of the church, by the holy sacrament of baptism, he must have chosen you from among so many millions who are born in infidelity and heresy. Lastly, in bringing you into religion by his lights, his invitations, and by his special graces, he must have preferred you before the numberless multitudes of seculars, whom he has left in the world in the midst of so many dangers and occasions of losing their immortal souls. Now, if you do not love your God with your whole heart and soul ; if you do not consecrate your entire being to his service ; to whom will you give your heart ? "This," says the Psalmist, "is the generation of them that seek the Lord." (Ps. xxiii. 6.) Who can behold virgins of noble birth and splendid fortunes, despising the pomp and pleasures of the world which they might have enjoyed, and

shutting themselves up in a convent, to live in poverty and abjection ; who, I say, can behold these holy virgins without exclaiming—"this is the generation of them that seek the Lord?"

6. Since, then, God has called you to be his spouse, all your thoughts and affections must be fixed on him, and on him alone. "Have no connexion," says St. Bernard, "with the world ; forget all things ; reserve yourself for him alone whom you have chosen from among all." (S. Ber. Sermon. 40 in Can.) Now, that you are consecrated to Jesus Christ, what have you to do with the world ? Forget all things, and endeavour to preserve your whole heart for that God who has chosen you for his spouse in preference to so many others. You must give him your whole heart : for Jesus Christ requires that his spouse be an enclosed garden, a sealed fountain. "My spouse is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up." (Can. iv. 12.) The spouse of Jesus must be an enclosed garden, admitting into her heart no lover but Jesus : "An enclosed garden," says Gilbert, "which admits none but her beloved." (Ser. 35, in Cant.) She must be a sealed up fountain : for he is a jealous Spouse, who will suffer no one to share in the affections of his beloved. "Put me," he says, "as a seal upon thy heart ; as a seal upon thy arm : for love is strong as death." (Can. viii. 6.) I desire to be placed as a seal upon your arm, that you may love none but me, and that my glory may

be the sole object of all your actions. "The beloved," says St. Gregory, "is put as a seal upon the heart and arm of his spouse; because, in a holy soul the intensity of her love is shewn by the affections of the will, and by the works of her hands." Oh! how love, when it is strong, banishes from the soul every affection which is not for God: "For love is strong as death." As no created power can avert the stroke of death, when the hour of dissolution arrives, so there is no obstacle which a soul, filled with divine love, will not overcome. "If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing." (Can. viii. 7.) A heart which loves God despises all that the world can give, and disregards all that is not God. "When," says St. Francis of Sales, "a house takes fire, the furniture is thrown out through the windows; and when a soul burns with divine love, she, without the aid of sermons, of spiritual reading, or the exhortations of directors, divests herself of all affection for creatures, to possess and to love her only Supreme Good—the God of Majesty, and Sovereign of the universe.

7. Perhaps, dear Sister, so much love is not due to your Spouse, Jesus, who died upon the cross for your redemption; who has given you himself so often in the holy communion, and who has enriched your soul with so many special graces which have not been granted to others? "Reflect," says St. John Chrysostom, "that



he has given you himself entirely and without reserve. He has given all to you: he has reserved nothing to himself." This consideration was one of the principal means by which St. Bernard enkindled in his soul the flame of divine love. "He," says the Saint, "was given to me entirely: he was wholly consumed for my benefit." My Saviour has given me his adorable divinity and his sacred humanity; he has become a whole burnt offering for my sake: can I refuse to consecrate my entire being to his love? "My beloved to me, and I to him." (Can. ii. 16.) My beloved has given himself entirely to me: it is but just that I dedicate to him my soul, my body, my life, and all my possessions. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzis used to say, that a religious being called to be the spouse of a crucified God, should, in all her actions, have in view no object but Jesus crucified, and should in her whole life have no other occupation than the continual meditation of the eternal love which her divine Spouse bore to her. When Jesus was about to accomplish the redemption of man, he said: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." (John, xii. 31.) Perhaps, by these words, the Son of God meant that after his crucifixion the devil was to be banished from the earth? "No," says St. Augustine, "but from the hearts of the faithful." (Trac. 4, in Ep. ad. Joan.) Now, if Jesus Christ has died for all, he has suffered,

in a special manner, for his virginal spouses. Since, then, a God has given himself entirely for your salvation, would it not be enormous ingratitude in you to refuse to him the sacrifice of your whole heart, or to love him only with reserve? Say, then, frequently to your Spouse: O my Jesus, you have given yourself to me without reserve: you have offered your blood, your labour, your merits, for my sanctification. In a word, your favours were so abundant and magnificent, that even in the inexhaustible treasures of your own divinity, nothing better remained to be conferred upon me. I therefore give myself entirely to you; I offer to you all that I possess, or shall ever possess, upon earth; I consecrate to you all my pleasures, my body, my soul, my will, my liberty. I have nothing more to present to you: if I had, you should have it. I renounce all that the world can give, and declare that you alone can satisfy the desires of my heart. "Oh!" said St. Teresa, "what a profitable exchange, to give our hearts to God, and, in return, to be made the objects of his love." "But," continues the Saint, "because we do not offer to him the undivided affections of our souls, he does not bestow upon us all the treasures of his love."

8. The spouse of Jesus should sing no other than that canticle of love recommended by holy David: "Sing to the Lord a new canticle." (Ps. xcvi. 1.) "What," says St.

Augustine, "is a new canticle, but new love." (Ser. 256, de temp.) The by-gone canticles are those affections to creatures and to ourselves, to which we have been subject from our birth, and which continually spring up from the inclinations to evil transmitted to us by our first parents. "For," says the Holy Ghost, "the imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth." (Gen. viii. 21.) But the new canticle is love by which the soul is consecrated to God. "The voice," says St. Augustine, "of this singer of canticles, is the voice of holy love : let us love him for his own sake." The voice of the soul praising God, is the fervour of charity which makes her love him, because he merits her love, and banishes from her affections whatever is not God. Jesus crucified commands his spouses to be crucified to all earthly things. Whenever, then, the world places before your eyes its pomps and delights, you should exclaim with St. Paulinus : " Let the rich enjoy their treasures, and kings their thrones : Christ is our kingdom and our glory." His love is more valuable to us than the sovereignty of the earth. The spouse of Jesus should desire nothing but love ; should live but for love ; should seek only to advance continually in love : she should incessantly languish with love in the choir, in the cell, the dormitory, the garden, in all places. Such should be the ardour of her charity, that the flames of her

love would extend to all parts of the convent, and even beyond the boundaries of the enclosure. To this love the Apostle exhorts and invites her, by the example of her beloved Spouse. Happy the religious who can say with St. Francis: "My God and my all." My God, who hast shewn to me such an excess of love, why should I seek earthly possessions?—I have found thee, the source of all happiness. "My God and my all," I care not for honours, for riches, or for pleasures. Thou art my glory, my treasure, my delight, and my all. "What have I in heaven?—and, besides thee, what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever." (Ps. lxxii. 25, 26.) Can I, O my God, find any one in heaven, or on earth, who is so deserving of my affection, or who has done so much to gain my love? Thou alone shalt be the Lord of my heart: thou shalt reign in its affections, and shalt rule its motions with sovereign sway. Thee alone shall my soul obey, seeking in all things thy holy will. "I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and will not let him go." (Can. iii. 4.) Yes, I have found the object of all my affections: I have found him who alone can make me happy. Though the world, with all its pleasures, and hell, with all its powers of darkness, should endeavour to separate me from thee, I will not abandon thee, O Jesus, my Spouse. "I held him, and will not let

him go." I will hold thee fast by my love, and will never suffer thee to depart from me. I desire to live and to die always, and in all things, united to thee.

9. To attain perfection, and to enjoy true peace of conscience, it is necessary to die to the world and to self. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." (Apoc. xiv. 13.) As corporal death is necessarily accompanied with pain, so abandonment of the world, and detachment from its pleasures, is utterly impossible without trials and sufferings. The kingdom of heaven is represented to us, in the holy scriptures, under various images. It is sometimes compared to a treasure which can be obtained only by selling all our possessions; sometimes to a city which, because the gate is narrow, no one can enter without fatigue and industry; sometimes to a place in which the stones, (that is, the souls of which it is composed,) must be polished with the utmost care; sometimes to a feast, to which no one is admitted unless he abandon all other concerns; sometimes to a prize which cannot be won without running to the end; and finally, to a crown, for the acquisition of which it is necessary to fight and conquer. In a word, to die to the world, self-love must die in the soul. St. Augustine says, that the love of God increases in proportion as self-love is diminished; and that the destruction of the latter is the perfection of the former. "The diminution,"

says the holy Doctor, "of cupidity is the nutriment of charity ; but its total absence is the perfection of charity." (Lib. 81, qu. 36.) Charity is estimated, not by its tenderness, but by its strength. Ardent charity smoothes every asperity, and surmounts every obstacle. "There is nothing," says St. Augustine, "so difficult which the fire of love does not conquer." (In Joan. tract. xlviii. 3.) In another place he says : "In what we love there is no labour ; or if there be, we love the very labour itself." (De Bono. Vidui. cap. 21.) In a soul that loves God, torments endured for his sake excite no pain ; or if they do, these pains are, to her, a source of happiness and delight. In his confessions, the Saint writes, that when he gave himself entirely to God, the very privation of sensual gratifications filled his soul with joy ; and, that, though he, at first, dreaded their loss, he afterwards had reason to rejoice at their relinquishment. "How sweet, on a sudden, was it become to me to be without these joys ! And what I was before so much afraid to lose, I now cast from me with joy." (Lib. ix. cap. 1, num. 2.) To a religious who has fixed her whole heart on God, the practice of poverty, of obedience, mortification, and of all virtues, is easy and agreeable ; but to her whose affections are divided between God and creatures, all the duties of religion are an intolerable burden.

10. It is true, that whatever good we do

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comes from God, and that without his grace we cannot even pronounce the name of Jesus. But, notwithstanding our absolute dependence on divine grace, God commands us to perform our part, and to co-operate with him in the work of our salvation. Many desire to become saints, but wish that God would do all, and that he would bring them to eternal glory without labour or inconvenience to them. But this is impossible: the law of God is said to be a yoke borne by two, to shew that the divine aid, on the one hand, and our co-operation on the other, are indispensably necessary for its observance. And sometimes, to carry this yoke, and merit everlasting happiness, we must do violence to the feelings of flesh and blood. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." (Mat. xi. 12.) And St. Paul says, that the crown of life shall be given to him only who shall combat till he overcomes the enemies of his salvation. O spouse of Jesus, "hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Apoc. iii. 11.) Since Jesus Christ has made you his spouse, do not allow your enemies to snatch from you the eternal dignity of queen which he has prepared for you in his kingdom; but on the contrary, hold fast your crown by assimilating yourself to your beloved—the predestined model of the elect: "For whom, he foreknew, he also predestined to be made conformable to the image of his Son." (Rom.

viii. 29.) He has gone before you, crowned with thorns, scourged at the pillar, loaded with the cross, and saturated with contempt and reproach; and in that pitiable condition he invites you to follow him, and to deny yourself: "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mat. xvi. 24.) He has died for you, and it is your duty to sacrifice your life for him, and to say with the seraphic St. Francis: "O good Jesus, may I die for the love of thee, who hast condescended to die for the love of me." Yes, it is but just that you should die to yourselves, and live only for that God who has died for your salvation: "That they, also," says the Apostle, "who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them." (2 Cor. v. 15.) You, indeed, are weak; but, if you trust in the goodness of your Spouse, his grace and strength will prepare you to execute so arduous a task. When the devil molests you, and endeavours to cast you into despair by representing to you the difficulties and miseries of a life of continual mortification, of incessant self-denial, and of perpetual abstinence from sensual pleasures, answer him in the words of the Apostle: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.) Of myself I can do nothing; but the Lord, who has chosen me for his spouse, will give me courage and strength to walk in the rugged path of his



commandments. "If," says St. Teresa, "we be not in fault, God will assuredly, by his all-powerful aid, enable us to become saints." And, O my God, upon whom, if not upon your spouses, will the obligation of sanctity be imperative? O consecrated virgins, offer yourselves frequently to God with a strong desire and determination to please him in all things, and implore continually the assistance of his holy grace. He has promised to grant whatsoever is asked of him with confidence. "All things whatsoever you ask, when ye pray, believe that you shall receive; and they shall come unto you." (Mark, xi. 24.)

11. What then do you fear? Have courage; God has taken you from the world; he has delivered you from its snares; has called you to his love; and has, if you be faithful to him, prepared for you numberless helps and graces. You have already left the world; you have, as St. Teresa used to say to her spiritual children, taken the most difficult and important step; and to become a saint little now remains to be done. Resolve, then, at once to dissolve every worldly attachment. Perhaps, after having forsaken the world, and renounced all its goods, after having voluntarily relinquished your liberty, and bound yourself, by vow, to perpetual enclosure; perhaps, after all these sacrifices, you are disposed, for the miserable gratifications of sense or caprice, to risk your all—the everlasting possession of Paradise and

of God—and to prefer, before the exalted glory of spouse of the Most High, the degraded slavery of satan, who will render you unhappy in this life, and eternally miserable in the next? Resolve, then, I say again, to burst every earthly tie, and tremble, lest the words which you now read should be the last invitation of your Spouse. Do not resist the voice of God any longer. If you neglect his call, on this occasion, he may, perhaps, abandon you for ever. Resolve, then, resolve! “The devil,” says St. Teresa, “is afraid of resolute souls.” St. Bernard teaches, that many souls are lost through want of fortitude. Take courage, then, and trust in the power and goodness of God: strong resolutions overcome all difficulties. Oh! happy, thrice happy soul, if, in obedience to the voice of God, you give yourself entirely to your Spouse, Jesus. When death approaches you can return thanks to him for his favours, and address him in the words of the glorious St. Agnes: “O Lord, who has taken from me the love of the world, receive my soul.” O my God, who hast disengaged my heart from creatures, that all its affections might be fixed on thee, receive, now, my soul, that I may be admitted into the kingdom of thy glory to love thee with all my strength, without fear of being ever separated from thee—the Supreme and Infinite Good.

12. Oh! that all religious would imitate the example of the venerable Frances Farnese.

Her life, at first, was very imperfect ; but, happening one day to read the history of the Franciscans in Japan, she was suddenly seized with compunction, and exclaimed : “ And what, my Sisters, will we do ? We have forsaken our families and our goods, and shall we now draw down upon our souls the vengeance of God and the sentence of eternal death, by attachment to the things of the world which we do not possess ? ” From that moment she resolved to give up the world, and to consecrate herself entirely to God. This resolution she afterwards fulfilled in the accomplishment of that wonderful reformation of the order, which was planned and executed by her directions. “ Men,” says St. Jérôme, “ always seek to advance in the knowledge of their secular profession, but are satiated with the mere rudiments of the science of the saints. In all their worldly pursuits,” says the Saint, “ men are never satiated ; but in virtue it is sufficient for them to have made a beginning.” (Epis. ad Demet.) Every Christian is bound to tend to perfection. “ When I speak of a Christian,” says St. Ambrose, “ I mean a perfect man.” (Ser. 12, in Ps. 118.) The precept by which all are commanded to love God with all their strength, imposes upon all the obligation of perfection. Besides, to discharge the duty of preserving sanctifying grace, it is necessary to struggle for the constant perfection of charity in the soul : for, in the path of virtue, he

that does not advance, recedes and exposes himself to the danger of sin. Now, if this is true with regard to all Christians, how more so must it be with regard to religious, who are bound by a stricter obligation to seek perfection, not only because they receive more abundant graces and more powerful helps to sanctity, but, also, because they have solemnly promised to observe the vows and rules of religion.

13. But to fulfil the command by which you are obliged to aspire to perfection, an inefficacious and fruitless desire of sanctity is not sufficient. You must do violence to yourself, and adopt the means of attaining perfection. It will not be necessary for you to undertake very extraordinary things, it will be sufficient to perform your ordinary exercises with diligence and attention, to observe your rule with exactness, and to practise with fidelity the Gospel virtues. However, a religious, who desires to become a saint, will not confine herself to the mere discharge of the duties prescribed by her rule, which is accommodated to weak as well as to perfect souls; she must also perform supererogatory works of prayer, of charity, of mortification, and of the other virtues. St. Bernard says, that "what is perfect must be singular." A religious, who barely discharges the ordinary duties of the community, will never attain sublime sanctity. It is your duty, then, to do violence to your-

self, and courageously to adopt the means of arriving at perfection.

14. The principal means are: First, a strong and ardent desire to become a saint. Second, great confidence in Jesus Christ and in his holy mother. Third, to avoid every deliberate sin or defect, and after a fault not to lose courage, but to make an act of contrition for it, and then resume your ordinary occupation. Fourth, to cut off all attachment to creatures, to selfwill, and self-esteem. Fifth, to resist continually your own inclinations. Sixth, to observe with exactness the rules of religion, however unimportant they may appear. Seventh, to perform your ordinary duties with all possible perfection. Eighth, to communicate often—with the permission of your director; to make long and frequent meditations, and to perform all the mortifications which he will permit. Ninth, to prefer, on all occasions, those actions which are most agreeable to God, and most opposed to self-love. Tenth, to receive all crosses and contradictions with joy and gladness from the hands of God. Eleventh, to love and benefit those who persecute you. Twelfth, to spend every moment of your time for God. Thirteenth, to offer to God all your actions, in union with the merits of Jesus Christ. Fourteenth, to make a special oblation of yourself to God, that he may dispose of you and of all you possess in whatever way he pleases.

Fifteenth, to protest continually before God that his pleasure and love are the only objects of your wishes. Sixteenth ; lastly, and above all, to pray continually, and to recommend yourself with unbounded confidence to Jesus Christ and to his virgin mother, and to entertain a special affection and tenderness towards Mary. I conclude with the words which the venerable Father Antony of Torres, after an ecstasy of love, addressed to a religious who was one of his penitents: "My child, love, love your Spouse, who is the only object that merits your love."

#### PRAYER.

O my God ! O amiable lover ! O infinite love ! and worthy of infinite love, when shall I love you as you have loved me ? It is not in your power to give me stronger proofs of love than those you have already given. You have spared nothing : you have expended your blood and your life to oblige me to love you ; and shall I love you only with reserve ? Pardon me, O my Jesus, if, in my past life, I have been so ungrateful as to prefer my accursed pleasures before the love which I owed to you. Ah ! my Lord and my Spouse, discover to me always more and more, your infinite loveliness, that I may be daily more enamoured of your perfection, and that I may continually endeavour to please you as you deserve to be pleased. You command me to love you, and I desire

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nothing but your love. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Speak, O Lord: tell me what you desire from me: my wish is to obey you in all things. I will no longer resist the graces and mercies you have bestowed upon me. You have given yourself entirely to me: I offer myself without reserve to you. For your mercy's sake accept and do not refuse this oblation. By my infidelities I have deserved to be cast away from your love: but the desire to be your's, which you have infused into my soul, assures me that you have already accepted my offer. I love you, O God, who are infinitely amiable: I love you, O my Sovereign good. You are, and shall be for ever, the only delight of my heart, and the sole object of my affections. And, since you have said—"Ask, and you shall receive," and have promised to grant whatsoever we ask, I beg with St. Ignatius, that "you will give me only your love along with your grace, and I shall be sufficiently rich." Give me your love and your grace; grant that I may love you, and be beloved by you, and I shall be content, and shall desire nothing else from you. O Mary, who belonged always and entirely to God; by that love which our Lord bore to you through all eternity, obtain for us the grace henceforth to love God, and him alone.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *On the desire of perfection.*

AN ardent desire of perfection is the first means which a religious should adopt, to acquire sanctity and to consecrate her whole being to God. As the sportsman, to hit a bird in flight, must take aim in advance of his prey, so a Christian, to make progress in virtue, should aspire to the highest degree of holiness which it is in his power to attain. "Who," says holy David, "will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest." (Ps. liv. 7.) Who will give me the wings of the dove to fly to my God, and, divested of all earthly affection, to repose in the bosom of the Divinity? Holy desires are the blessed wings with which the saints burst every wordly tie, and fly to the mountain of perfection, where they find that peace which the world cannot give. But, how do fervent desires make the soul fly to God? "They," says St. Lawrence Justinian, "supply strength, and render pains light and tolerable." On the one hand, good desires give strength and courage, and on the other, they diminish the labour and fatigue of ascend-



ing the mountain of God. Whosoever, through diffidence of attaining sanctity, does not ardently desire to become a saint, will never arrive at perfection. A man who is desirous of obtaining a valuable treasure which he knows is to be found at the top of a lofty mountain, but who, through fear of fatigue and difficulty, has no desire of ascending, will never advance a single step towards the wished for object, but will remain below, in careless indifference and inactivity. And he who, because the path of virtue appears to him narrow and rugged, and difficult to be trodden, does not desire to climb up the mountain of the Lord, and to gain the summit of Christian perfection, will always continue in a state of tepidity, and will never make the smallest progress in the way of God.

2. On the contrary, he that does not endeavour to advance continually in holiness, will, as we learn from experience, and from all the masters of spiritual life, go backwards in the path of virtue, and will be exposed to great danger of eternal misery. "The path of the just," says Solomon, "as a shining light goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day. The way of the wicked is darksome: they know not when they fall." (Prov. iv. 18, 19.) As light increases constantly from sunrise to full day, so the path of the saints always advances; but, the way of sinners becomes continually more dark and gloomy, till

they know not where they go, and at length walk into everlasting ruin. "Not to advance," says St. Augustine, "is to go back." St. Gregory beautifully explains this maxim of spiritual life, by comparing a Christian, who seeks to remain stationary in the path of virtue, to a man situated in a boat on a rapid river, and striving to keep the boat always in the same position. If the boat be not continually propelled against the current, it will be carried away in an opposite direction, and consequently, without continual exertion, its station cannot be maintained. Since the fall of Adam man is naturally inclined to evil from his birth. "For the imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth." (Gen. viii. 21.) If he do not push forward, if he do not endeavour by incessant efforts to improve in sanctity, the violence of passion will carry him back. "Since you do not wish to proceed," says St. Bernard addressing a tepid soul, "you must fail." "By no means," she replies; "I wish to live, and to remain in my present state. I will not consent to be worse; and I do not desire to be better." "You, then," rejoins the Saint, "wish what is impossible." (Epis. 253, ad. Gariv.) Because, in the way of God, a Christian must either go forward and advance in virtue, or go backwards and rush headlong into crime.

3. In seeking eternal salvation, we must, according to St. Paul, never rest, but must run

continually in the way of perfection, that we may win the prize, and secure an incorruptible crown. "So run that you may obtain." (1 Cor. ix. 24.) If we fail, the fault will be ours : for God wills that all be holy and perfect. "This is the will of God—your sanctification." (1. Thes. iv. 3.) He even commands us to seek perfection. "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mat. v. 48.) He promises and gives, as the holy Council of Trent teaches, abundant strength, for the observance of all his commands, to those who ask it from him. "God does not command impossibilities ; but, by his precepts, he admonishes you to do what you can, and to ask what you cannot do ; and he assists you, that you may be able to do it." (Sess. vi. c. 13.) God does not command impossibilities ; but, by his precepts, he admonishes us to do what we can by the aid of his ordinary grace ; and when greater helps are necessary, to seek them by humble prayer. He will infallibly attend to our petitions, and enable us to observe all, even the most difficult of his commandments. Take courage, then, and adopt the advice of the venerable Father Torres to a religious who was one of his penitents : "Let us, my child, put on the wings of strong desires, that, quitting the earth, we may fly to our Spouse and our Beloved, who expects us in the blessed kingdom of eternity."

4. St. Augustine teaches, that the life of a

good Christian is one continued longing after perfection. "The whole life," says the Saint, "of a good Christian, is a holy desire." (Tract. 4, in 1. Ep. Joan.) He that cherishes not in his heart the desire of sanctity, may be a Christian; but he cannot be a good one. If this be true of all the servants of God, how much more so must it be of religious, who, though it is not imperative on them to be actually perfect, are strictly obliged to aspire after perfection. "He that enters the religious state," says St. Thomas, "is not commanded to have perfect charity; but he is bound to tend to it. It is not," continues the Saint, "obligatory on him to adopt all the means by which perfection may be attained; but, it is his duty to perform the exercises prescribed by the rule, which, at his profession, he promised to observe." (2, 2. qu. 186, ar. 2.) Hence, a religious is bound not only to fulfil her vows, but also to assist at public prayer; to make the communions, and to practise the mortifications ordained by the rule; to observe the silence, and to discharge all the other duties of the community.

5. You will, perhaps, say, that your rule does not bind under pain of sin. That may be: but, theologians generally maintain, that, to transgress without sufficient necessity, even the rules which of themselves do not impose a moral obligation, is almost always a venial fault. Because, the wilful and unnecessary violation of rule generally proceeds from pas-

sion, or from sloth, and consequently must be, at least, a venial offence. Hence, St. Francis de Sales, in *his entertainments*, teaches, that, though the rule of the visitation did not oblige under the penalty of sin, still the infraction of it could not be excused from the guilt of a venial transgression. "Because," says the Saint, "by disobedience to her rule, a religious dishonours the things of God, violates her profession, disturbs the community, and dissipates the fruits of the good example which every one should give." Whoever, then, breaks the rule in the presence of others, will, according to the Saint, incur the additional guilt of scandal. It should be observed, that the breach of rule may be even a mortal sin, when it is so frequent as to do serious injury to regular observance. To violate the rule, through contempt, is likewise a grievous transgression. And St. Thomas remarks, that the frequent infraction of rule practically disposes to the contempt of it. This is my answer to those tepid religious who excuse their own irregularities by saying that the rule imposes no obligation. The fervent spouses of Jesus Christ do not inquire whether their rule has the force of a precept or not: it is enough for them to know that it is approved by God, and that he takes complacency in its observance.

6. As it is impossible to arrive at perfection in any art or science without ardent desires of its attainment, so no one has ever yet become

a saint, but by strong and fervent aspirations after sanctity. "God," observes St. Teresa, "ordinarily confers his signal favours on those only who thirst after his love." "Blessed," says the royal Prophet, "is the man whose help is from thee: in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps, in the vale of tears. \* \* \* They shall go from virtue to virtue." (Ps. lxxxiii. 6.) Happy the man who has resolved, in his soul, to mount the ladder of perfection: he shall receive abundant aid from God, and will ascend from virtue to virtue. Such has been the practice of the saints, and especially of St. Andrew Avellino, who even bound himself by vow, "to advance continually in the way of Christian perfection." (Lect. 5, offic. in dic. Testi.) St. Teresa used to say, that "God rewards, even in this life, every good desire." It was by good desires that the saints arrived, in a short time, at a sublime degree of sanctity. "Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time." (Wis. iv. 13.) It was thus that Lewis Gonzaga, who lived but twenty-five years, acquired such perfection, that St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, to whom he appeared in bliss, declared, that his glory equalled that of most of the saints. In the vision he said to her: my eminent sanctity was the fruit of an ardent desire, which I cherished during my life, of loving God as much as he deserved to be loved: and, being unable to love him with that infinite love which

he merits, I suffered on earth a continual martyrdom of love, for which I am now raised to that transcendent glory which I enjoy.

7. The works of St. Teresa contain, besides those that have been already adduced, many beautiful passages on this subject. "Our thoughts," says the Saint, "should be aspiring: from great desires all our good will come." In another place, she says: "We must not lower our desires, but should trust in God that by continual exertion we shall, by his grace, arrive at the sanctity and felicity of the saints." Again she says: "The Divine Majesty takes complacency in generous souls who are diffident in themselves." This great Saint asserted, that in all her experience she never knew a timid Christian to attain as much virtue in many years, as a courageous soul acquires in a few days. The reading of the lives of the Saints contributes greatly to infuse courage into the soul. It will be particularly useful to read the lives of those who, after being great sinners, became eminent saints; such as the lives of St. Mary Magdalen, St. Augustine, St. Pelagia, St. Mary of Egypt, and especially of St. Margaret of Cortona, who was for many years in a state of damnation; but, even then, cherished a desire for sanctity; and who, after her conversion, flew to perfection with such rapidity, that she merited to learn by revelation, even in this life, not only that she was predestined to glory, but also, that a place was

prepared for her among the Seraphim. St. Teresa says, that the devil seeks to persuade us that it would be pride in us to desire a high degree of perfection, or to wish to imitate the saints. She adds, that it is a great delusion, to regard strong desires of sanctity as the offspring of pride : for, it is not pride in a soul, diffident of herself, and trusting only in the power of God, to resolve to walk courageously in the way of perfection, saying with the Apostle—"I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.) Of myself I can do nothing ; but, by his aid I shall be able to do all things, and, therefore, I resolve to desire to love him as the saints have loved him.

8. It is very profitable frequently to aspire after the most exalted virtue ; such as to love God more than all the saints ; to suffer for his glory, more than all the martyrs ; to bear and to pardon all injuries ; to embrace every sort of fatigue and suffering for the sake of saving a single soul ; and to perform similar acts of perfect charity. Because, these holy aspirations, though their object shall never be attained, are, in the first place, very meritorious in the sight of God, who glories in men of good will as much as he abominates a perverse heart and evil inclinations. Secondly, because the habit of aspiring to heroic sanctity, animates and encourages the soul to perform acts of ordinary and easy virtue. Hence it is of great importance to propose, in the morning,



to labour as much as possible for God during the day ; to resolve to bear patiently all crosses and contradictions ; to observe constant recollection ; and to make frequent acts of the love of God. Such was the practice of the seraphic St. Francis. " He proposed," says St. Bonaventure, " with the grace of Jesus Christ, to do great things." St. Teresa asserts, that " the Lord is as well pleased with good desires, as with their fulfilment." Oh ! how much better is it to serve God than to serve the world. To acquire goods of the earth, to procure wealth, honours, and applause of men, it is not enough to pant after them with ardour : no, to desire, and not to obtain them, only renders their absence more painful. But, to merit the riches and the favour of God, it is sufficient to desire his grace and love. St. Augustine relates, that, in a convent of hermits, there were two officers of the emperor's court, one of whom began to read the life of St. Antony. " He read," says the holy Doctor, " and his heart was stripped of the world." Turning to his companion he said : " What do we seek ? Can we expect from the emperor any thing better than his friendship ? Through how many dangers, are we to reach still greater perils ?—and how long shall this last ? Fools that we have been, shall we still continue to serve the emperor in the midst of so many labours, fears, and troubles ? We can hope for nothing better than his favours : and should

we obtain it, we would only increase the danger of our eternal reprobation. It is only with difficulty that we shall ever procure the patronage of Cæsar; but, if I will it, behold, I am, in a moment, the friend of God." Because, whoever wishes, with a true and resolute desire, for the friendship of God, instantly obtains it.

9. I say with a *true and resolute desire*: for little profit is derived from the fruitless desires of slothful souls who always desire to be saints, but never advance in the way of God. Of them Solomon says: "The sluggard willeth and willeth not." (Prov. xiii. 4.) And again: "Desires kill the slothful." (Prov. xxi. 25.) The tepid religious desires perfection, but never resolves to adopt the means of its acquirement. Contemplating its advantages she desires it; but, reflecting on the fatigue necessary for its attainment, she desires it not. Thus, "she willeth and willeth not." Her desires of sanctity are not efficacious: they have for object means of salvation incompatible with her state. Oh! she exclaims, were I in the desert, all my time should be employed in prayer and in works of penance; were I in another convent, I would shut myself up in a cell to think only of God: if my health were good, I would practise continual mortifications. I would wish, she cries, to do all this; and still the miserable soul does not fulfil the obligations of her state. She prays but little; and is

even absent from the prayers of the community; she neglects communion; is seldom in the choir, and frequently at the grate and on the terrace: she practises but little patience or resignation in her infirmities: in a word, she daily commits wilful and deliberate faults, but never labours to correct them. What, then, will it profit her to desire what is inconsistent with the duties of her present state, while she violates strict and imperative obligations? “Desires kill the slothful.” Such useless desires expose the soul to great danger of everlasting perdition: because, wasting her time, and taking complacency in them, she will neglect the means necessary for the perfection of her state and for the attainment of eternal life. “I do not,” says St. Francis of Sales, “approve of the conduct of those who, while bound by an obligation, or placed in any state, spend their time in wishing for another manner of life inconsistent with their duties, or for exercises incompatible with their present state. For, these desires dissipate the heart, and make it languish in the necessary exercises.” It is, then, the duty of a religious to aspire only after that perfection which is suitable to her present state, and to her actual obligations; and, whether a superior, or a subject, whether in sickness or in health, the vigour of youth, or the imbecility of old age, to adopt resolutely the means of sanctity suitable to her condition in life. “The devil,” says St. Teresa, “some-

times persuades us that we have acquired the virtue, for example, of patience, because we determine to suffer a great deal for God. We feel really convinced that we are ready to accept any cross, however great, for his sake: and this conviction makes us quite content: for the devil assists us to believe that we are willing to bear all things for God. I advise you not to trust much to such virtue, nor to think that you even know it, except in name, until you see it tried. It will probably happen, that, on the first occasion of contradiction, all this patience will fall to the ground."

10. Let us now come to what is most important—the means to be adopted for acquiring sanctity. The first means of perfection is mental prayer, and particularly the meditation of the claims which God has to our love, and of the love which he has borne towards us, especially in the work of redemption. To redeem us, a God has sacrificed his life in a sea of sorrows and contempt; and, to obtain our love, he has gone so far as to make himself our food. To inflame the soul with the fire of divine love, these truths must be frequently meditated. "In my meditation," says David, "a fire shall flame out." (Ps. xxxviii. 4.) When I contemplate the goodness of my God, the flames of charity are kindled in my heart. St. Lewis Gonzaga used to say, that, to attain eminent sanctity, it is first necessary to arrive at a high degree of prayer. The

second means of perfection is, to renew frequently your resolution of advancing in divine love. In this renewal, you will be greatly assisted by considering, each day, that it is only then you begin to walk in the path of virtue. This was the practice of holy David : “ And I said now have I begun.” (Ps. lxxvi. 11.)—And was the dying advice of St. Antony to his monks: “ *My dear children, figure to yourselves that each day is the day on which you began to serve God.*” The third means is, to search out continually and scrupulously the defects of the soul. “ Brethren,” says St. Augustine, “ examine yourselves with rigour. Be always displeased with what you are, if you desire to become what you are not.” (De verb. Apos. Serm. 15.) To arrive at that perfection which you have not attained, you must never be satisfied with the virtue you possess. “ For,” continues the Saint, “ where you have been pleased with yourself, there you have remained.” Wherever you are content with the degree of sanctity which you have acquired, there you will rest, and, taking complacency in yourself, you will lose the desire of further perfection. Hence, the holy Doctor adds what should terrify every tepid soul who, content with her present virtue, cares but little for her spiritual advancement : “ But if you have said it is sufficient, you have perished.” If you have said that you have already attained sufficient perfection, you are lost: for, not to

advance in the way of God, is to retrograde; and, as St. Bernard says, "not to wish to go forward, is certainly to fail." (Ep. 253, ad Gariv.) Hence, St. Chrysostom exhorts us to think continually on the virtues which we do not possess, and never to reflect on the little good which we have done: for, the thought of our good works "generates indolence, and inspires arrogance"—(Hom. xii. in Ep. ad Phil.)—and serves only to engender sloth in the way of the Lord, and to swell the heart with vain glory, which exposes the soul to the danger of losing the virtues she has acquired. "He that runs," continues the Saint, "does not compute the progress he has made, but the distance he has to travel." He that aspires after perfection, does not stop to calculate the proficiency he has made, but directs all his attention to the virtues he has still to acquire. Fervent Christians—"as they that dig a treasure"—(Job, iii. 21)—advance in virtue as they approach the end of life. "As," says St. Gregory, "the man who seeks a treasure, the deeper he has dug, the more he exerts himself in the hope of finding it; so the soul, that pants after holiness, multiplies her efforts to attain it, in proportion to the advancement she has made.

11. The fourth means is that which St. Bernard employed to excite his fervour. "He had," says Surius, "this always in his heart, and frequently in his mouth—'Bernard, for

what purpose hast thou come?" " Every religious should continually ask herself the same question. I have left the world, and all its riches and pleasures, to live in the cloister, and to become a saint—what progress do I make? I do not advance in sanctity; no, but, by my tepidity I expose myself to the danger of eternal perdition. It will be useful to introduce, in this place, the example of the venerable Sister Hyacinth Marescotti, who at first led a very tepid life in the convent of St. Bernardine, in Viterbo. She confessed to Father Bianchetti, a Franciscan, who came to the convent as extraordinary confessor. That holy man thus addressed her: "*Are you a nun? Are you not aware that Paradise is not prepared for vain and proud religious?*" "Then," she replied, "*I have left the world to cast myself into hell?*" "Yes," rejoined the Father, "*that is the place which is destined for religious who live like seculars.*" Reflecting on the words of the holy man, Sister Hyacinth was struck with remorse; and, bewailing her past life, she made her confession with tearful eyes, and began from that moment to walk resolutely in the way of perfection. O how salutary is the thought of having abandoned the world to become a saint! it awakens the tepidity of the religious, and encourages her to advance continually in holiness, and to surmount every obstacle to her ascent up the mountain of God. Whenever, then, O spouse of Jesus, you meet

with difficulties in the practice of obedience, say to your heart : I have not entered religion to do my own will ; if I wished to follow my own inclinations I should have remained in the world. But I have come here to do the will of God, by obedience to my superiors ; and this I desire to do in spite of all difficulties. Whenever you experience the inconveniencies of poverty, say—I have not left the world, and retired into the cloister, for the enjoyment of ease and riches, but to practise poverty for the love of my Jesus, who, for my sake, became poorer than I am. When you are rebuked or treated with contempt, say—I have become a religious only to receive and bear with patience the humiliations due to my sins, and thus be rendered dear to my divine Spouse, who was so much despised on earth. By this means you will live to God and die to the world. In conclusion, I recommend you frequently to ask yourself this question : what will it profit me to have abandoned the world, to have confined myself in the cloister, and to have given up my liberty, if I do not become a saint, but if, on the contrary, I expose my soul to everlasting misery, by a careless, and tepid, and negligent life ?

12. The fifth means, for a religious to attain sanctity, is frequently to call to mind and to renew the sentiments of fervour, and the desires of perfection which she felt when she first entered religion. The Abbot Agatho being once



asked by a monk for a rule of conduct in religion, replied : “ See what you were on the day you left the world, and persevere in the dispositions you then entertained.” Remember, O consecrated virgin, the resolutions which you made, on the day you retired from the world, to seek nothing but God, to have no will but his, and to suffer all manner of contempt and hardship for the love of Jesus Christ. This thought, as we learn from the lives of the Fathers—(Part ii. §. 201)—brought back to his first fervour, a young monk who had fallen into tepidity. When he first determined to retire into a monastery, his mother strongly opposed his design, and endeavoured by various reasons to shew that it was his bounden duty not to abandon her. To all her arguments he replied : *I am resolved to save my soul.* And, in spite of her opposition, he entered religion. But, after some time, his ardour cooled, and tepidity stole into his heart. His mother died, and, a little after her death, he was seized with a dangerous malady. In his sickness, he thought he saw himself before the judgment seat of God, and his mother reproaching him with the violation of his first resolution : My son, said she, you have forgotten the words, *I have resolved to save my soul,* by which you replied to all my entreaties. You have become a religious, and is it thus you live ? He recovered from his infirmity, and, reflecting on his first fervour, he commenced a life of holiness,

and began to practise such mortifications, that his companions advised him to moderate his austerities. To their admonitions he answered : “ If I have not been able to bear the rebuke of my mother, how shall I, if I abuse his graces, support the reproaches of Jesus Christ in judgment ? ” The reading of the lives of the Saints is very profitable to us ; their example humbles us, and makes us know and feel our own miseries. The poor understand their poverty only when they see the treasures of the rich.

13. The sixth means is, not to lose courage when you perceive that you have not as yet arrived at the perfection to which you aspire. To be discouraged by our imperfections, would be to yield to a great illusion of the devil. St. Philip Neri used to say, that to become a saint is not the work of a day. It is related, in the lives of the Fathers, that a certain monk, after having commenced his religious career with great fervour, relaxed his zeal, and remained for some time in a state of tepidity. But, reflecting on his unhappy condition, he began to sigh after his former piety, and became greatly afflicted because he knew not how to recover it. In this disposition of mind he sought advice from an aged Father. The good Father consoled and encouraged him, by relating the conduct of a parent who commanded his son to clear a certain portion of land from thorns and briars. Disheartened by the difficulty of the task, and despairing of success, the son

neglected altogether the duty imposed upon him, and excused himself to his father, saying that he had not courage to undertake such labour. In answer, the father said to him : My son, I only ask you to cleanse every day as much land as will contain a human body. The son began the work, and, by degrees, he removed every useless and noxious plant. This example is well adapted to encourage and stimulate us in our progress to perfection. He that always cherishes an ardent desire of advancement, and strives continually to go forward, will, with the divine assistance, obtain the perfection after which he aspires. St. Bernard says, that, to make constant exertions to advance in virtue, is the greatest perfection that can be attained in this life. "Continual efforts for perfection," says the Saint, "are reputed perfection." (Ep. 253, ad Ab. Garivum.) You must be careful never to omit your usual exercises, prayers, communions, or mortifications. This rule must be observed particularly in the time of aridity: it is then that God tries his faithful servants, and that they prove their fidelity to him, by discharging, in spite of their darkness, pains and difficulties, the duties which, amid the abundance of his celestial consolations, they were accustomed to perform.

14. The last and most efficacious means of perfection is, to have continually before your eyes the examples of the Sisters who are most

distinguished for sanctity, and to imitate the virtues which they practise. As the bee, says St. Antony, gathers honey from every flower, so a religious should draw lessons of perfection from the good examples of all her companions. She should emulate the modesty of one, the charity and the affection for prayer of another, the frequent communion of a third, and all the other virtues practised by the rest of the community. Such is the holy zeal with which a good religious should endeavour to rival, and even to excel, all the sisters in all virtues. Worldlings seek to surpass each other in riches, honours, and earthly pleasures. But a religious ought to struggle for the superiority in humility, patience, meekness, charity, love of contempt, poverty, purity, and obedience. To outstrip each other, in loving and pleasing God, should be the object of their emulation. To succeed in this holy contest, a religious must perform all her ordinary actions with an intention of pleasing God, and of edifying her companions, that thus she may sanctify herself and give greater glory to the Lord. "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mat. v. 16.) Hence, they who admit to the religious profession a novice, whose conduct disedified her Sisters, incur a frightful responsibility: for, as good example stimulates to virtue, so the loose and irregular lives of the tepid, scanda-

lize the community, and lead many of its members into the faults which they witness every day.

#### PRAYER.

O divine heart of my Jesus—heart enamoured of men—heart created to love them—how is it possible that you have been so much dishonoured and despised by them? Unhappy me! I, too, have been one of those ungrateful souls; I, too, have lived so many years in the world and have not loved you. Pardon me, O my Jesus, the great fault of not having loved you, who are so amiable, and who have loved me so much that you could not have done more than you have done to oblige me to love you. In punishment of having so long despised your love, I would deserve to be condemned to that miserable state in which I could never love you. But no, my Spouse, I cheerfully accept every chastisement, except the eternal privation of your love. Grant me the grace to love you, and then dispose of me as you please. But how can I fear such a chastisement, when you continue still to command me to love you, my Lord and God. Thou shalt, you say, love thy Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart. It is your will that I love you with my whole soul, and I desire nothing but to love you with all my strength. O loving heart of my Jesus, light up in my soul that blessed fire which you came on earth to en-

kindle. Destroy all the earthly attachments which still live in my heart, and prevent me from belonging entirely to you. O my beloved Saviour, do not reject the love of a heart which has hitherto so much afflicted you. Ah! since you have loved me so much, do not permit me to live, for a single moment, without your love. O love of my Jesus, you are my love. I hope that I shall always love you, and that you will always love me; and that this mutual love shall never be dissolved. O Mary, mother of love: O you who desire to see your Son loved, bind and unite me to Jesus, so that I may become entirely his, as he desires me to be.

## CHAPTER V.

*On the danger to which the salvation of an imperfect religious is exposed, who is but little afraid of her imperfections.*

THE first step to be taken in the formation of a garden is, to root out all useless and noxious weeds, and to put in their place, fruitful and salutary plants. It was in this way the Almighty commanded Jeremiah to proceed, when he imposed upon him the arduous task of cultivating the church. "Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, to build, and to plant." (Jer. i. 10.) To become a saint, then, a religious must, in the first place, endeavour to eradicate from her soul all imperfections, and to plant in their stead, the virtues of the Gospel. "The first devotion," says St. Teresa, "is to take away all sins." I do not speak of grievous sins, from which I suppose the religious who reads this book, to be exempt. I hope she has never lost the grace of God infused by baptism, or, at least, that she has recovered it, and, that she is resolved to suffer a thousand

deaths rather than forfeit it again. To prevent the danger of relapse, I entreat her to keep always in mind the alarming doctrine so strongly inculcated in the holy scriptures, and taught by St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and other Fathers, that God has fixed, for each person, the number of sins which he will pardon. Being ignorant of this number we should tremble, lest, adding another to our past sins, we complete the measure of our iniquities, be abandoned by God, and lost for ever. This thought has powerful efficacy in dispelling the illusion by which the devil so often induces Christians to relapse into sin. Holding out the hope of pardon to them, he says—*you may indulge your passion for this time; you will afterwards confess it, and obtain forgiveness.* Oh! if Christians were penetrated with the salutary fear that any new sin should never be forgiven, would they not be struck with horror at the very idea of relapse? But, because they hope for pardon, innumerable souls return to their former crimes, until the measure of their iniquities is filled up; and are thus irremediably lost.

2. Neither do I speak of venial faults of inadvertence, or of human frailty, when I say that a religious should cleanse her soul from all sins. From such imperfections no one is exempt: “For,” says St. James, “in many things we all offend.” (Ep. iii. 2.) Even the saints have fallen into sins of frailty. “If,”



says St. John, "we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1. Ep. i. 8.) Our corrupt nature is so strongly inclined to evil, that it is impossible for us, without a most special grace, (which has been given only to the mother of God,) to avoid, during our whole lives, all venial sins—even those that are but imperfectly deliberate. God permits such defects even in souls dedicated to his love, to keep them humble, and to make them feel, that, as they fall into light transgressions, in spite of all their resolutions and promises, so, but for his divine support, they should likewise be precipitated into the most enormous crimes. When we are guilty of a venial fault, we must humble our souls, and, confessing our weakness, must endeavour to multiply prayer, and to implore the aid of the protecting arm of God against more grievous offences.

3. Here, then, I mean to speak only of deliberate and voluntary venial sins. All these may be avoided, and are seldom or never committed by holy souls who live with the firm and constant resolution, rather to suffer death than, with full advertence, to be guilty of a venial violation of God's holy law. St. Catharine of Genoa used to say, that, to a soul inflamed with the pure love of God, the smallest fault is more intolerable than hell itself. Hence, she frequently protested, that, rather than wilfully commit a venial sin, she

would suffer to be cast into an ocean of fire. It is no wonder that the saints had such a horror of the smallest sin: for, illuminated by the light of God, they saw and felt that the least offence against his infinite Majesty, is a much greater evil than the death and destruction of all men and Angels. "What sin," says St. Anselm, "will the sinner dare to call small? For, when can it be a slight fault to dishonour God?" Who shall ever be daring enough to assert, that such a sin, because it is venial, is not a great evil? Can it be ever said that an indignity to the Lord is but of little moment? If a subject said to his sovereign—in other things I will obey you, but not in this, because it is unimportant—what censure and chastisement would he not deserve? Hence, St. Teresa used to say: "*Would to God we had a horror, not of the devils, but of every venial sin, from which we may suffer far greater injury than from all the devils in hell.*" She would frequently say to her spiritual children, "from all deliberate sins, however small, may God deliver you." Religious should take particular care to avoid the least offence of God. Of them, St. Gregory Nazianzen says: "Do you know that in you a wrinkle is a greater deformity, than the greatest wounds are in seculars." (Orat. de Fuco.) If a servant, whose occupation renders cleanliness impossible, appear in soiled clothes before her king, he treats her with compassion

rather than with severity. But, if he sees a stain on the garments of his spouse, the queen, he is indignant, and bursts out into expressions of complaint and reproach. Jesus Christ is likewise indulgent to the sins of seculars, but bitterly complains of the faults of his spouses. Unhappy the religious who is regardless of light defects ! She shall never become a saint, and shall never enjoy peace. St. Teresa, while she led an imperfect life, made no progress in virtue, and enjoying neither spiritual consolation, nor sensual pleasure, lived in a state of continual misery. It is because they are heedless of their imperfections, that so many nuns are always unhappy. They are, on the one hand, far removed from the pleasures of the world, and, on the other, never experience the joy and tranquillity of a good conscience. For, since they are not generous to God, he is justly sparing in his favours to them. Let us offer our whole being to God and he will give himself entirely to us. "I to my beloved, and his turning is towards me." (Can. vii. 10.)

4. But you will say, venial sins, however great, though they may prevent me from being a saint, will never deprive me of the grace of God, nor of eternal life ; and, for me, it is enough to obtain salvation. Whosoever speaks thus, should reflect on the words of St. Augustine : "Where you have said it is sufficient, you have perished." Do you then say that

for you salvation is sufficient? If you do, you are lost. To understand this truth, and to see the danger of venial sins, particularly when they are deliberate and habitual, it is necessary to consider that the habit of light faults inclines the soul to grievous transgressions. Thus, the habit of slight aversions disposes the will to mortal hatred, the habit of small thefts to gross rapine, and the habit of sensual attachments to impure affections. St. Gregory (Mor. lib. 21,) says, that "the soul never remains where it falls;" no, she always sinks still lower. As mortal diseases frequently proceed from slight indisposition, so grievous transgressions often have their origin in venial sins. "Trivial detractions," says Father Alvarez, "slight aversions, culpable curiosity, impatience, and intemperance, do not kill the soul; but, they render her so weak, that, when assailed by any grievous temptation, she has not strength to resist it, and falls." Venial sins do not indeed separate the soul from God, but they estrange her affections from him, and thus expose her to great danger of losing his grace. When Jesus was taken in the garden, St. Peter did not wish to abandon his Master, but "followed him afar off." (St. Mat. xxvi. 58.) Many, though unwilling to be separated from Jesus Christ by mortal sins, will follow him only at a distance, and will make no effort to abstain from venial faults. But, how many of that class of Christians have

imitated the conduct of St. Peter, who three times denied that he was a disciple of the Redeemer, and to his denial, added the guilt of perjury. St. Isidore says, that in punishment of their indifference, and the tepidity of their love to him, God justly permits those who disregard venial faults, to fall into mortal sins. "He that despises small things shall fall by little and little."

5. Do not therefore say that the habit of venial sins is only a small evil; but reflect on its consequences. A bad habit is an ulcer which infects the soul; and, as it diminishes her strength to avoid light faults, so it gradually renders her unable to resist grievous temptations. "Do not," says St. Augustine, "contemn them because they are small, but fear them because they are numerous: ruin is to be apprehended from their multitude, though not from their magnitude." Despise not your faults because they are venial, but tremble because they are many: for, the greatness of their number may bring upon you that destruction which the heinousness of their malice does not deserve. "You," says the Saint, in another place, "carefully fly from the danger of being crushed by a rock: but I caution you to shun the risk of suffocation by a heap of sand." By a collection of sand, the holy Father means habitual venial transgressions, which, when committed with deliberation and without efforts of amendment, destroy in the

soul the fear of mortal sin. And whoever fears them but little, will easily fall into the most shameful crimes. Hence St. John Chrysostom has gone so far as to assert that we should, in a certain manner, have a greater dread of habitual venial sins than of mortal sin. Because the latter naturally excites horror; but, as the habit of the former generates negligence and contempt for small faults, so likewise it induces a disregard for grievous irregularities. Hence the Holy Ghost says: "Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines." (Can. ii. 15.) He does not tell us to catch the lions, but the little foxes. We tremble at the approach of the lion, or of other fierce animals, and therefore we take care to guard against their attacks; but we fear not the little foxes, and therefore through our negligence they, by their excavations, dry up the root, and destroy the vine. In like manner, frequent and voluntary faults, though small, dry up the good desires of the soul, which are the sources of spiritual life, and thus produce decay and ruin.

6. Habitual and voluntary venial sins expose the soul to the danger of perdition: first, because, as we have already seen, they dispose the will to mortal sin, and diminish its strength to resist temptations. Secondly, because they deprive her of numberless helps from God, which he had prepared for her. To incline the will to good, the understanding must be continually illuminated by the light of God; and

to become pliant and obedient to the motions of grace, the will requires the constant assistance of God. Besides, to resist the powers of hell, we stand in need of the continual protection of the Lord. Without it, we should all yield to the temptations of the devil, which of ourselves we are utterly unable to overcome. It is God that enables us to conquer all the powers of darkness, and prevents the devil from suggesting temptations to which we should yield. Hence Jesus Christ has taught us the prayer, "and lead us not into temptation ;" that is, preserve us from those temptations to which we should consent. Now, what are the effects of venial sins ? They diminish the lights—the helps and the protection of God ; so that the soul, being darkened, weak, and dry, will lose all affection for the things of God ; will become attached to the things of the world ; and thus exposed to great danger of renouncing the grace of God for the sake of earthly goods. Besides, in punishment of venial sins, Almighty God permits the soul to be assailed with more violent temptations. Whoever is ungenerous to God does not deserve liberality from him. "He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly." (2. Cor. ix. 6.) Blessed Erric Suson, in the vision of the rocks described in his life, (*vita* cap. 12,) seeing a great many on the first rock, asked who they were. Jesus Christ answered : "These are the tepid who only seek to avoid mortal

sin." The holy man then asked if they should be saved. "If," replied the Redeemer, "they die in the state of grace, they shall be saved: but their danger is much greater than they imagine. They think they can serve God and the senses; but this is scarcely possible: for, it is exceedingly difficult to persevere in the grace of God, and at the same time to indulge in sensual pleasures."

7. "Be not without fear about sins forgiven." (Ecc. v. 5.) Why does the Holy Ghost admonish us to be afraid of sin which has been already pardoned? Because, after the guilt is remitted, the temporal penalties of sin still remain: and among them we must reckon the withdrawal of God's graces. Hence, the saints never ceased to weep for their faults, though only venial, and, even after they had been forgiven: for, they trembled lest their past transgressions should be punished by the subtraction of the graces necessary to obtain eternal life. A favourite who has offended his sovereign, will not be raised to his former rank and dignity immediately after he has obtained pardon, nor until he has given strong proofs of a determination to atone, by future services, for his past misconduct. And, when christians insult the Majesty of their God, he justly withdraws his protecting arm, and his former familiarity, until, by tears of sorrow and works of penance, they have expiated their guilt. The more frequently the soul displeases God,



the more will he retire from her. By repeated faults her weakness and her inclination to evil are increased, while the graces of God are diminished, and then she will easily fall into mortal sin and into eternal ruin.

8. Every christian who, because he desires to do only what is necessary for salvation, commits habitually deliberate venial sins, is, as we have seen, exposed to the danger of being lost. How much more perilous must be the state of a religious who, with full knowledge, and without any thought or effort of amendment, commits light faults, saying, *for me it is sufficient to be saved*. The spouse of Jesus being called to religion, is called not only to be saved, but also to be a saint. Now, St. Gregory says, that he who is called to sanctity, will not be saved without it. Jesus Christ said, one day, to blessed Angela of Foligno : “ *They, who, after being enlightened by me to walk in the way of perfection, will only tread in the ordinary path, shall be abandoned by me.*” It is certain that every religious is called and commanded to walk in the way of perfection. It is to enable her to become a saint, that God has bestowed upon her so many special lights and graces. Now, if she lead a life of negligence and continual defects, without ever seeking to correct them, she will justly forfeit all claim to the helps necessary for the fulfilment of her obligations, and thus she will neither become a saint, nor be saved.

St. Augustine says, that God ordinarily abandons tepid souls who, reckless of the consequences, wilfully neglect their duties, and disregard their imperfections. "God is accustomed to desert the negligent."

9. "If," says Jesus to St. Peter, "I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me." (John, xiii. 8.) Jesus Christ spoke, in this place, not of the physical washing of the feet, but of the spiritual cleansing of the soul from venial sins which, unless corrected and expiated, will make those who are called to perfection, liable to great danger of perdition. St. Gertrude saw the devil gathering all the little tufts of wool which she allowed to be destroyed; as if her negligence, in not preserving them, were a fault against holy poverty. To another religious, who, contrary to rule, permitted the fragments of bread which remained after meals to fall off the table, he shewed, at the hour of death, a large mass of these fragments, which he had collected, and, by this representation, endeavoured to lead the religious into despair. The enemy of our souls is well aware that God will demand a much stricter account from religious than from seculars. And here it may be remarked, that, according to the common opinion of theologians, many violations of rule, which in subjects are but light faults, will be grievous sins in the superior, if she do not correct them, and insist on the reparation necessary to pre-

serve rigorous discipline. To this class, belong the faults regarding silence, poverty, fasts, the grate, and all similar transgressions. And, superiors are strictly obliged not only to correct such defects, but also to examine carefully whether they have been committed.

10. Let us now return to the obligation of a religious to aim at perfection, and to avoid even venial sins. In the time of St. Ignatius, there was one of the lay brothers very negligent in the service of God. One day the Saint said to him : "Tell me, brother, for what purpose have you entered religion?" "I have come," replied the brother, "to serve God." "O brother," rejoined the Saint, "what have you said? If you answered that you had come to attend a Cardinal or an earthly prince, your conduct would be more excusable : but, you say you have come to serve the Lord ; and, is it thus you serve him?" To become a saint, the religious stands in need of particular and abundant graces. Now, how can God be expected to bestow his favours in abundance on the religious, who, after having retired into the cloister to serve the Lord, dishonours rather than glorifies his name? For, by her negligence and frequent defects, she insinuates that God does not merit to be served with greater fervour. By her imperfect life she declares, that his service does not content the soul, or impart that felicity which is represented in the holy scriptures as the portion of God's

servants on earth; and, by her self-love she proclaims that his divine Majesty does not deserve to be loved in preference to the indulgence of caprice or sensuality.

11. "It is true," says Father Alvarez, "that even souls devoted to the love of God are not free from all imperfections. But they seek continually to amend their lives by diminishing the number of their defects." But how will the tepid religious, who commits habitual faults, and continues to commit them without remorse or desire of amendment; how, I say, will she be ever able to purify her soul from them, or to escape the danger of falling into mortal sin? The venerable Lewis du Pont used to say—I have been guilty of many faults; but never without scruple and uneasiness of conscience. Wo to the religious who sins, even venially, with full knowledge and tranquillity of soul. "As long," says St. Bernard, "as the soul detests her imperfections we may hope for amendment; but, when her faults excite neither fear nor remorse, then will she continually rush from light to more grievous transgressions." "Dying flies," says the wise man, "spoil the sweetness of the ointment." (Eccl. x. 1.) "These dying flies," says the Carthusian, "are the defects which remain in the soul, and are not detested; such as habitual rancours, inordinate affections, vanity, indulgence of the appetite, want of modesty in looks, and of delicacy in words. These defects

spoil the sweetness of the ointment; they diminish devotion at communion, at prayer, and in the visitation of the blessed sacrament. Thus the soul loses all the spiritual unction and consolations of religion."

12. These habitual faults, like a foul incrustation, take away the beauty of the soul, render it an object of disgust, and unworthy the embraces of the Holy Ghost. "They are," says St. Augustine, "as it were an irruption, and destroy our comeliness so as to remove us from the embraces of the Spouse." (Hom. 50, cap. 3.) Hence, feeling no more consolation in her exercises of devotion, the soul will soon omit and abandon them; and, neglecting the means of salvation, she will probably be lost. If the tepid religious should continue her communions, prayers, and visits to the blessed sacrament, she will draw but little fruit from them. In her, will be verified the words of the Holy Ghost: "You have sowed much, and brought in little. \* \* \* \* And he that hath earned wages, put them into a bag with holes." (Agg. i. 6.) Such precisely is the imperfect religious. All her spiritual exercises are laid up in a bag with holes: for them no reward remains. Being performed with so much tepidity, they render her always more and more deserving of chastisement, and deprive her of those abundant helps which God was prepared to bestow upon her, had she corresponded with his holy inspirations. "For

he that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound ; but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath.”

(Mat. xiii. 12.) Whoever by his co-operation treasures up the fruit of the graces received from God, shall obtain an increase of grace and of glory ; but from the man who buries his talent, thus rendering it unprofitable, that which he hath will be taken, and the graces prepared for him will be withheld.

#### PRAYER.

Behold, O Lord, I am one of those unhappy souls who deserved to be left by you in the miserable state of tepidity in which, deprived of your light and abandoned by your grace, I lived for so many years. But I now see the light which you give me ; and I hear your voice calling me again to your love. These graces are so many proofs that you have not as yet abandoned me. And since you have not cast me away in punishment of so much ingratitude, I desire never more to be ungrateful to you. You are ready to pardon me, if I repent of the offences I have committed against you. Pardon me, O Jesus, for I detest and abhor my sins above all things. Would that I had died before I ever offended you. You wish for my love : I desire nothing but to love you. I love you, O my Sovereign good : I love you, O my God, who are worthy of infinite love. Increase, O Lord, in my soul your

own light, and the desire you give me to belong entirely to you. You are omnipotent; you can easily change my heart, and make a rebel to your graces become an ardent lover of your goodness. Such I desire and hope to be, with the assistance of your grace. You have promised to hear all who pray to you. I now ask you to make me belong entirely to you, and love nothing but you alone. Ah! Jesus, my Spouse, through the merits of your blood, make me love you as a sinner ought to love, whom you have loved so much, and whose ingratitude you have borne with so much patience, and for so many years. Trusting, then, in your infinite mercy, I hope, with a firm confidence, to love you with my whole heart in this life, and, in the next, to praise for all eternity your mercies to me. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever." O Mary, my mother, I acknowledge that these graces, this light, these desires, and this good will, which God now gives to me, are the fruits of your intercession. Continue, O Mary, continue to intercede for me, and do not cease to pray for my sanctification, until my whole being shall be, as you desire, consecrated without reserve to Jesus Christ. Such, O Mary, my firm hope: may it soon be realized. Amen.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *Continuation of the same subject.*

1. THE religious whose faults spring from attachment to any passion, is exposed, in a particular manner, to the danger of being lost. O God! how many religious are there who, because they do not disengage their hearts from certain earthly attachments, never become saints, and endanger their eternal salvation. To conquer her passions, to expel from her soul all worldly affections, and to remove every obstacle to her progress in perfection, should be the end and object of a religious, in all her spiritual exercises, in her communions, prayers, spiritual lectures, and in all similar duties. To this end she should direct all her devotions, and all her prayers, begging continually of the Almighty a perfect detachment from every creature, and a complete victory over all her corrupt inclinations. To gain this victory, she ought, in the first place, to direct her attention to the practice of exterior mortification, and particularly to the mortification of the eyes, of the appetite, and of the tongue. Secondly, she should endeavour to mortify and to eradi-



cate all the irregular affections of the heart, such as attachment to self-esteem, to the things of the world, or to any other object in which she takes delight. Thirdly, she must strive to destroy selfwill, by acting continually in opposition to her own inclinations. Lastly, she should seek to do all this with ease and with cheerfulness: for, in this great contest with the corruption of nature, she shall always have some passion to moderate, or some virtue to improve. There are some who continue their communions and prayers, but in them they only seek spiritual refreshment and sensible devotion. Hence, they remain always bound down to the earth by worldly attachments, which continually impede their advancement in holiness, and make them recede more and more every day from their first fervour.

2. It frequently happens that such persons lose the grace of God. It is necessary to impress deeply on your mind, that the artifice by which the devil seeks to draw spiritual souls from the service of God is, not to tempt them at first to any mortal sin. In the beginning he is, as St. Teresa says, satisfied to hold them in bondage by a single hair: for, if he attempted to bind them at once in the bonds of servitude, they would fly from him with horror. But, fearing not the trammels of a single hair, they are easily led into the snares prepared for their destruction. At first, they are caught by

a single hair ; then they are bound by a slender thread ; next, by a strong cord ; and finally, they are chained in the fetters of hell and the slavery of satan. For example, a religious, after a dispute with some of her sisters, will, at first, retain feelings of rancour, and thus is held by a single hair. After a little time, she will neither speak to them nor salute them : she is now bound by a slender thread. Next, she will begin to injure them by words and deeds, and is fettered by a strong cord : then, on the first occasion of provocation, she conceives a mortal hatred towards them, and thus puts on the chains of hell and the slavery of the devil. Again, another religious will, at first, entertain a human affection towards a friend ; she then cherishes this affection under the pretext of gratitude : mutual presents follow ; they are succeeded by words of endearment ; and by the first assault of passion, the miserable soul is bound in the chains of death. In fine, as gamesters, by the loss of many small sums, are induced to risk and to lose their whole property ; so the tepid soul, by frequent venial faults, is rendered reckless of God's grace and too weak to resist the temptations of the enemy. Thus she loses her God and her all. To find us addicted to any passion, is, to the devil, a powerful stimulus to exert himself for our destruction. "It is," says St. Ambrose, "principally when he sees any passions generated in us, that the adver-

sary lays his snares : it is then that he excites concupiscence, and prepares his nets." The enemy endeavours to discover the evil inclinations which predominate in our hearts, and, presenting to us opportunities of indulging those corrupt tendencies, foment our passions, and prepares a snare for our ruin.

3. "When," says Cassian, "we hear of the fall of a soul consecrated to God, we are not to imagine that she fell at once into mortal sin. No, we must suppose that she began by light faults, and by them was led into grievous transgressions." St. Chrysostom asserts, that he knew many persons who appeared to be adorned with all virtues, and who, because they disregarded venial sins, were precipitated into an abyss of crime. The venerable Sister Anne, of the Incarnation, saw, in hell, a soul reputed by her and by all, to be a saint. On her countenance appeared a multitude of small animals representing the first faults which she disregarded. Of these animals some were heard to say to the unhappy soul, "*with us you commenced;*" others, "*by us you continued;*" and the rest, "*by us you were lost.*" Hence mother Mary Vittoria Strada used to say: "*The devil, when he cannot have much, is content with a little; and with that little, he afterwards acquires a great deal.*" At first, the serpent tempted Eve not to eat, but only to behold the forbidden fruit: he then raised doubts about the fulfilment of the divine

threats; and, in the end, induced her to violate the command of God. St. Teresa observes, that, in the beginning, the enemy is satisfied when a soul opens to him the gate of her heart; but afterwards he seeks to obtain full possession of it. This is likewise the doctrine of St. Jerome. "The devil," says the holy Doctor, "does not contend at once against any one by temptations to great vices, but only to small faults, that he may, by some means, enter and govern the heart of man, and that he may afterwards impel him to more heinous crimes." (Ep. xl.) He does not immediately tempt any one to mortal sin; but commences by suggesting light defects, that, gaining admission into the soul, and beginning his rule, he may afterwards draw her into grievous transgressions. "No one," says St. Bernard, "is plunged at once into the depths of turpitude: they who fall into the greatest enormities begin by the smallest faults." An insignificant spark will set fire to a whole forest. "Behold," says St. James, "how small a fire—what a great wood it kindleth!" (James, iii. 5.) A single unmortified passion will precipitate the soul into ruin.

4. And here it is necessary to remark most particularly, that whenever a religious is guilty of mortal sin, her fall will expose her to great danger of being abandoned by God: for, being committed amid the lights and graces of God imparted to her by means of so many sermons,

communions, meditations, good example of companions, admonitions of spiritual directors, and of superiors, her transgression will not be like that of seculars, who sin in the midst of the darkness of the world, but, will be a sin of malice. After having received so many lights, and having in her hands so many means of obtaining strength against the enemy of her salvation, she cannot allege ignorance or weakness in extenuation of her guilt. According to the doctrine of St. Thomas, a sin of malice is that which is committed with a full knowledge of its enormity. Hence, because the darkness arising from sin is proportional to the lights bestowed on its author, the sin of malice produces great misery in the soul. Besides, the angelic Doctor teaches, that the grievousness of sin increases in proportion to the ingratitude of the sinner. Now, the graces and favours which a religious has received from God are innumerable. He has taken her from the midst of the dangers of the world, and, because every convent is the house of God, has given her a place in his own habitation. From a vast multitude of his servants he has selected her for his spouse; and, to make her a saint, and fit to be the spouse of God, he has enriched her with so many lights and so many external and internal helps to sanctity. He has frequently given himself to her in the holy Eucharist; and in her meditations, visits, and spiritual lectures, has often spoken to her with

the familiarity of a friend. In a word, he has raised her up from the depths of lowliness and placed her among the princes of his people. And, after all these favours, she by sin turns her back upon him, and deliberately determines to become his worst enemy. Unhappy soul ! her fall will be her destruction. He that falls on level ground, seldom sustains serious injury : but he that tumbles from a lofty eminence, is said not to fall, but to be dashed to ruin. "A fall from on high," says St. Ambrose, "is accompanied with great destruction." And the Prophet Ezechiel says : "And I set thee in the holy mountain of God. \* \* \* And thou hast sinned : and I cast thee out from the mountain of God and destroyed thee." (Ezec. xxviii. 14, 16.) Ungrateful soul, the Almighty will say to the religious, I have placed thee on the mountain of God, and from its summit you have fallen into sin. In punishment of your ingratitude, I will banish you for ever from my face, and will cast you into eternal misery. "God," says Sister Mary Strozzi, "*wishes religious to be the mirror of the entire world. Hence, because they are called to extraordinary perfection, they dishonour him greatly by an imperfect life. The sin of a religious excites the horror of Paradise, and obliges the Almighty to turn away from her : for, he repudiates faithless spouses who violate the contract made at their profession, and therefore he abandons*

*them to their irregular passions."* O how difficult is the conversion of a soul who, after having once tasted the sweetness of God, becomes a rebel to his love.

5. A religious, then, should tremble at the thought of being bound to the service of satan by any passion, or by any even the smallest sin. She should, I say, tremble; because every little attachment may be the cause of her damnation. St. Teresa used to say, that "whoever approaches ruin, will be lost." This observation is most just. For, although she had never been guilty of a mortal sin, Almighty God shewed to her the place prepared for her in hell, if she had not relinquished an irregular though not an unchaste affection which she entertained towards a relative. A bird unshackled flies with ease, but when tied, even by a slender thread, he remains on the earth; and like the toad, will continue to crawl in the mire. So, a religious, free from all earthly attachments, flies and will continually fly to God. But, while any affection to creatures dwells in her heart, she will never rise above the earth, but will fall continually into greater defects, till at length all is lost. In fine, you must be persuaded that the salvation of a religious depends on the correction of light faults, particularly when frequent and habitual: for, so many little streams will form a river in which she will be overwhelmed. Habitual faults disregarded and not corrected

will, by degrees, draw her into the state of tepidity—that miserable state of which the Redeemer said to the Bishop of Laodicea: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot.” (Apoc. iii. 15.) Behold the state of a tepid religious. She is not daring enough to abandon God altogether, but she despises light faults. She commits a great many of them every day, by impatience, lies, murmuring, greediness, imprecations; by aversions, and by attachments to worldly goods, to the grate, to curiosity, to self-esteem, and to self-will. And these imperfections she neither regrets nor endeavours to correct. “I would,” continues the Lord, “thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.” (Ibid.) *I would*, he says, *thou wert cold*: that is, it were better for you to be altogether deprived of my grace; for, then, there would be stronger hopes of your repentance. But, remaining in a state of tepidity, you will stand in great danger of damnation: because, you will easily fall from that state into mortal sin, and then there will be but little reason to hope for your resuscitation.

6. Speaking of a sinner not as yet converted, St. Gregory holds out hopes of repentance: but, speaking of a tepid soul who is not afraid of her imperfections, he despairs of her amendment. “Warmth which has failed from fervour is in despair.” The Son of God says:



“Because thou art lukewarm I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.” A draught, when cold or hot, may be taken without repugnance; but when tepid, it is nauseous. The lukewarm Christian stands in great danger of being vomited forth by Almighty God; that is, of being forsaken by his grace. By the words, “I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth,” the Redeemer signified that he was ready to abandon the tepid soul: for, what is vomited is taken back only with horror. But how does God begin to vomit the tepid religious out of his mouth? He ceases to give her the vivid lights of faith, the spiritual consolations, the holy desires, and the loving calls which he was accustomed to bestow upon her. Bereft of these blessings, she begins to neglect her prayers, communions, and visits to the blessed Sacrament, or to discharge these duties with repugnance, disgust, and distraction. She will perform all her exercises with reluctance, dissipation, with inquietude, and without devotion. Behold! how the Lord begins to vomit her out of his mouth. Thus the miserable soul finding only pain and trouble, and no comfort in any of her exercises of piety, she finally abandons them all, and falls into grievous sins. In a word, tepidity is a moral fever which is scarcely felt, but irremediably leads to death. The tepid soul never thinks of correcting her faults. She becomes so insensible to the stings of conscience, that, without per-

ceiving her fall, she will be one day precipitated into eternal misery.

7. *Then, the tepid religious will say, for me there is no hope of salvation? Because, she will add, it is almost impossible for me to arise from my miserable state.* But let her attend to the answer of Jesus Christ: "The things that are impossible with men, are possible with God." (Luke, xviii. 27.) What is impossible to man is not impossible to God. Whoever prays and adopts the necessary means, obtains all graces. What are the necessary means? If your faults are sins of inadvertence, or of frailty, they do but little injury to the soul, as long as you detest them with humility. And here it is necessary to remark that two sorts of humility arise from our defects—the one holy, and the gift of God, the other pernicious, and the offspring of the devil. The former is that by which the soul sees her imperfections, and is covered with confusion before God, and filled with a sense of her own nothingness. She is sorry for her faults; she detests them, but without being disturbed; and, at the sight of her misery she is not discouraged or agitated; but, trusting in God, she resolves to atone for her imperfections, by greater attention to her duties, and by greater fervour in works of piety. The other species of humility is that which fills the soul with agitation, with inquietude, and with diffidence; thus making her weak and almost

incapable of doing any good. *“True humility,”* says St. Teresa, *“though it makes the soul feel her own sinfulness, does not disturb her peace, but, on the contrary, infuses consolation. It fills, indeed, the heart with grief and affliction for having offended God, but, at the same time, inspires strong hopes of mercy. By such humility the soul is enlightened to see her own misery, and to praise God for having so long borne with her. But false humility instilled by the devil, brings with it no light to make the soul do good, but represents God as a tyrant who will destroy all by fire and sword. Of all the deceitful inventions of the devil, which I have known, this is the most subtle.”*

8. In the imperfections, then, which human weakness cannot avoid, as negligence is censurable, so excessive fear is reprehensible. *“In such almost inevitable faults,”* says St. Bernard, *“immoderate fear, as well as negligence, is culpable.”* (Serm. 1, in cœna. Dom.) We should be sorry, but not lose courage, when we commit such faults: for God readily grants pardon when the soul detests them. *“For the just man falls seven times, and shall rise again.”* (Prov. xxiv. 16.) He that sins through frailty easily rises. *“He falls and will rise again.”* St. Francis de Sales says, that as daily defects are indeliberately committed, so they are indeliberately taken away. St. Thomas teaches, that such faults are can-

celled "when the soul is fervently moved towards God"—(3. p. q. 87. a. 3.)—that is, by acts of divine love, of resignation, of oblation, and by similar works which spiritual souls are accustomed to perform. The angelic Doctor adds—(ibid.)—"that the *sacramentalia*; such as to recite the *Pater noster*, the *Confiteor*; to strike the breast; to receive the benediction of the Bishop; to sprinkle one self with holy water; and to pray in a consecrated church; produce the remission of such venial defects." The sacraments, but especially the holy Eucharist, have particular efficacy to remit venial sin. "The mind," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "may be so absorbed in devotion, by receiving the holy communion, that the soul will be purified from all venial sins." (Ser. 4. art. 3, cap. 2.)

9. This is true with regard to indeliberate sins. If a religious should have the misfortune to commit, sometimes, but not often, a deliberate venial sin, she should not, even then, lose courage, or permit the peace of her soul to be disturbed. Let her endeavour immediately to repair her fault by repentance, and by a strong determination not to be guilty of it again. Whenever she relapses, her sorrow and resolution should be renewed, and all her confidence placed in God, who, if she continues to act in this way after every fault, will finally deliver her from such deliberate sins. St. Philip Neri used to say, that to become a

saint is not the business of a day. Whoever leaves not the road of perfection in which he began to walk, ought not to despond, for he will ultimately arrive at sanctity. To convince us of our weakness, and to shew us that, without his aid and protection, we should fall into the greatest crimes, God sometimes permits us to commit deliberate venial sins. Such faults, then, though voluntary, provided they be unfrequent, do not seriously injure the soul, or, at least, they do not bring her into ruin. But light sins which are deliberate and habitual, easily lead the soul into perdition, particularly when they are committed through attachment to any passion, and without sorrow or efforts of amendment: for, they shew that the soul has fallen into a state of tepidity, from which, as we have already seen, it is very difficult to recover. But, if a religious should be so unfortunate as to have fallen into such a state, let her attend to the following means of emerging from it.

10. The first means is a true desire of being delivered from her miserable condition. If she feel not that desire, she ought, at least, to beg it of God, trusting in his promises, to give us whatsoever we ask. "Ask and you shall receive." The second means is to search out her defects, particularly her predominate failing. If, for example, she is full of self-esteem; if she frequently speaks in the language and tone of authority; if she is addicted

to self-praise; if she is disturbed by every humiliation and inattention from others; then she may conclude that pride is her ruling passion. Self-love will predominate in some who are afflicted at every little infirmity, who are annoyed at every inconvenience, and who always seek to gratify their palate, and cannot bear any food which is not agreeable to their taste. In others, anger is the prevailing fault: they are provoked by every contradiction, and complain of the conduct of all who thwart their inclinations. Others, for every trivial cause, neglect prayer, communion, the choir, and other similar duties: in them sloth holds the ascendancy.

11. Thirdly, as soon as she shall have discovered her predominant passion, a religious should make a strong resolution to free herself from it, and to contend with it till it is completely vanquished. "Thou shalt," says the Lord, "utterly destroy them." (Deut. vii. 2.) "*God,*" says St. Teresa, *requires of us only strong resolutions: he himself will do the rest.*" In another place she asserts, that the devil is afraid of resolute souls: but, he fears not those who, though they desire perfection, never resolve to become saints. Again, the saint says that God cheerfully lends his aid to all, however great their sinfulness may be, who, with a firm resolution, consecrate themselves entirely to his love. The prayer of a religious should be always concluded by strong resolu-

tions. "*Short prayer,*" says St. Teresa, "*which produces great effects, is better than prayer continued for many years, but devoid of holy resolutions.*" And of what use, I ask, is prayer in which we are content with certain devout affections, and certain general petitions, but, in which we never resolve to correct the faults we know to be an obstacle to our spiritual advancement?

12. The fourth and most necessary means is, to remove as much as possible the occasions of our defects. The devil laughs at all our resolutions and promises of amendment, as long as we expose ourselves to the occasions of sin. He once said that, of all instructions, that which treated on avoiding the occasions of sin, was the most displeasing to him. A religious, then, should endeavour to discover the causes of her defects: she ought to examine if they arise from familiarity with any person within or without the monastery; from remaining in such a place; from keeping up a correspondence by letters or by presents; or from similar causes. St. Teresa says, that if a soul do not relinquish worldly diversion, she will soon begin to fall back in the way of the Lord; and that, if all sinful occasions be taken away, she will advance rapidly in the love of God. This great saint also says, that a religious should communicate her temptations only to those who love perfection. If she disclose them to imperfect souls, she will do injury to herself and to others.

13. The fifth means is, to be particularly exact in performing acts of the virtues opposed to the evil inclinations which are most troublesome to her, and which most frequently lead her into ruin. For example, if she is prone to pride, she should take particular care to humble herself before all, and to bear patiently all the humiliations which she receives from others. If she is addicted to greediness, she ought to abstain as much as possible from the indulgence of her appetite. They that are inclined to other defects, should adopt similar means of conquering them. It will also, as Cassian observes, be very useful to represent to ourselves, in the time of prayer, the occasions which may occur; as, for example, any insult or injury which we are likely to receive; and then to resolve to humble ourselves, and to be resigned to the divine will. Such previous resolutions, (except with regard to temptations against chastity,) prepare the soul for sudden and unforeseen contradictions. It was by this means, that the saints were always prepared to bear with peace and joy all the derision, injuries, stripes and injustices which they received.

14. The sixth means is, to make the particular examen on the predominant passion, and to perform some penance as often as we yield to it. We must never cease to combat this passion until it is completely conquered: we must trust in the divine aid, and say with holy



David: "I will pursue after my enemies, and overtake them: and I will not turn again till they are consumed." (Ps. xvii. 38.) I will persecute my enemies; I will beat them down, and will not cease to combat them, till they are utterly destroyed. Remember that, however great your progress in virtue may be, it would be a fatal delusion to imagine that your passions are dead: for, although they may be extinguished for a time, they will again spring up, as long as you remain in the body. "How much soever," says St. Bernard, "you have advanced here below, you err, if you think your vices are not only suppressed, but dead." (Serm. 58, in Cant.) Hence Cassian observes, that, to prevent the passions you have subdued from resuming their sway, it is necessary to watch continually: for, if you slacken your exertion, they will return, and will rule your soul with still greater despotism.

15. To overcome any defect whatever, it is necessary, above all, to distrust altogether our own strength and exertions, and to place entire confidence in God, saying with David: "For I will not trust in my bow; neither shall my sword save me." (Ps. xliii. 7.) If we confide in our own resolutions and exertions, our labour will be lost. We must therefore pray without ceasing for the divine assistance, continually crying out, *have mercy on me, O Lord; assist me, O my God.* Jesus Christ has promised, that "he who asks shall receive;

and that he who seeks shall find." (Luc. xi. 9.) But, to obtain God's gifts, we must pray continually, and never cease to pray. "We ought," says the Redeemer, "always to pray, and not to faint." (Luc. xviii. 1.) Whenever we give up prayer, we shall be defeated. But, if we shall persevere in prayer, with a true desire of receiving the graces of God, though as yet we have not been conquerors, the victory shall, nevertheless, ultimately belong to us.

#### PRAYER.

O my Jesus, look not on my ingratitude to you, after all your mercies ; but turn your eyes to your own merits, and to the pains you suffered for me, from the crib of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary. I repent with my whole soul of all the offences I have offered to you. From this moment I consecrate to you my life which I desire to spend in doing all that I can to obey and to love you. I love you, O my Redeemer ; but, I love you too little : for your mercy's sake, increase in my soul your love. Hear my prayer, O Jesus, and make me, by your grace, continue to repeat this prayer. O love of my soul ! O that my heart may burn continually with your love. I have offended you grievously ; but for the future I desire to love you intensely : I desire to love you alone, because you alone deserve to be loved above all things. And I desire to love you for no

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other reason, but, because you are worthy of all love. O Mary, my mother and my hope, assist me.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *On interior mortification, or abnegation of self-love.*

1. **THERE** are two sorts of self-love—the one good, the other pernicious. The former is that which makes us seek eternal life—the end of our creation. The latter inclines us to pursue earthly goods, and to prefer them to our everlasting welfare, and to the holy will of God. “The celestial Jerusalem,” says St. Augustine, “is built up by loving God so as to condemn one self: but, the earthly city is raised by loving self so as to despise Almighty God.” (Lib. 14, de civ. c. 28.) Hence Jesus Christ has said: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.” (Mat. xvi. 24.) Christian perfection, then, consists in self-abnegation. Whoever denies not himself, cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ. “The augmentation of charity,” says St. Augustine, “is the diminution of cupidity: the perfection of charity is its destruction.” (Lib. lxxxiii. qu. 36.) The less, then, a Christian indulges passion, the more he will love God: and, if he seeks nothing but God, he will then possess perfect charity. But, in the present state of corrupt nature, it is not possible to be altogether

exempt from the molestation of self-love. Jesus alone, among men, and Mary alone, among women, have been free from its suggestions. All the other saints had to combat their irregular passions. The principal and the only care of a religious should be, to restrain the inordinate inclinations of self-love. "*To regulate the motions of the soul is,*" as St. Augustine says, "*the office of interior mortification.*"

2. Unhappy the soul that suffers herself to be ruled by her own inclinations. "A domestic enemy," says St. Bernard, "is the worst of foes." (De Anim. cap. 15.) The devil and the world continually seek our destruction; but self-love is a still more dangerous enemy. "*Self-love,*" says St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, "*is like a worm which corrodes the roots of a plant; deprives us not only of fruit, but of life.*" (Vita par. 3.) In another place she says: "*Self-love is the most deceitful of all enemies: like Judas, it betrays us with the kiss of peace. Whoever overcomes it, conquers all. He that cannot cut it off by a single stroke, should, at least, endeavour to destroy it by degrees.*" We must pray continually in the language of Solomon: "Give me not over to a shameless and foolish mind." (Eccl. xxiii. 6.) O my God, do not abandon me to my foolish passions that seek to destroy, in my soul, your holy fear, and even to deprive me of the use of my reason.

3. Our whole life must be one continued

contest. "The life of man upon earth," says Job, "is a warfare." (Job. vii. 1.) Now, he that is placed in the front of battle must be always prepared for an attack: as soon as he ceases to defend himself, he is conquered. And here it is necessary to remark, that the soul should never cease to combat her passions, however great her victories over them may have been: for, human passions, though conquered a thousand times, never die. "Believe me," says St. Bernard, "that, after being cut off, they bud forth again; and, after being put to flight, they return." (In Can. Ser. 58.) Hence, by struggling with concupiscence, we can only render its attacks less frequent, less violent, and more easy to be subdued. A certain monk complained to the Abbot Theodore, that he had contended for eight years with his passions, and that still they were not extinguished. "*Brother,*" replied the Abbot, "*you complain of this warfare of eight years, and I have spent seventy years in solitude, and during all that time I have not been, for a single day, free from assaults of passion.*" We shall be subject during our mortal lives to the molestation of our passions. "But," as St. Gregory says, "it is one thing to look at these monsters, and another to shelter them in our hearts." (Mor. lib. vi. cap. 16.) It is one thing to hear their roar, and another to admit them into our souls, and suffer them to devour us.

4. The human soul is a barren soil in which useless and noxious herbs constantly spring up: we must therefore, by the practice of holy mortification, continually hold the mattock in our hands, to root them up, and banish them from our hearts; otherwise, our souls shall become a wild uncultivated waste covered with briars and thorns. "Conquer yourself," was an expression always on the lips of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and the text of his familiar discourses to his religious. Conquer self-love, and break down your own wills. Few of those who practise prayer, (he would say,) become saints, because few of them endeavour to overcome themselves. "*Of a hundred persons,*" says the Saint, "*devoted to prayer, more than ninety are self-willed.*" Hence he preferred a single act of mortification of selfwill to long prayer accompanied with many spiritual consolations. "What does it avail," says Gilbert, "to close the gates, if famine—the internal enemy—produce general affliction?" (Serm. 26, in Cant.) What does it profit us to mortify the exterior senses, and to perform exercises of devotion, while, at the same time, we cherish in our hearts rancour, ambition, attachment to selfwill and to self-esteem, or any other passion which brings ruin on the soul?

5. St. Francis Borgia says, that prayer introduces the love of God into the soul, but mortification prepares a place for it, by banishing from the heart earthly affections—the most

powerful obstacles to charity. Whoever goes for water to the fountain, must cleanse the vessel of the earth which it may contain; otherwise he will bring back mire instead of water. "*Prayer without mortification*," says Father Balthassar Alvarez, "*is either an illusion, or lasts but for a short time.*" And St. Ignatius asserts, that a mortified Christian acquires a more perfect union with God in a quarter of an hour's prayer, than an unmortified soul does by praying for many hours. Hence, whenever he heard that any one spent a great deal of time in prayer, he said: "*It is a sign that he practises great mortification.*"

6. There are some religious who perform a great many exercises of devotion, who practise frequent communion, long prayers, fasting, and other corporal austerities, but make no effort to overcome certain little passions—for example, certain resentments, aversions, curiosity, and certain dangerous affections. They will not submit to any contradiction; they will not give up attachment to certain persons, nor subject their will to the commands of their superiors, or to the holy will of God. What progress can they make in perfection? Unhappy souls! they shall be always imperfect: always out of the way of sanctity. "They," says St. Augustine, "run well, but out of the way." They imagine they run well, because they practise the works of piety which their own selfwill suggests; but they shall be for



ever out of the way of perfection, which consists in conquering self. "*Thou shalt advance,*" says the devout a Kempis, "*in proportion to the violence thou shalt have offered to thyself.*" I do not mean to censure vocal prayer, or acts of penance, or the other spiritual works. But, because all exercises of devotion are but the means of practising virtue, the soul should seek in them only the conquest of her passions. Hence, in our communions, meditations, visits to the blessed Sacrament, and other similar exercises, we ought always to beseech Almighty God to give us strength to practise humility, mortification, obedience, and conformity to his holy will. In every Christian, it is a defect to act from a motive of self-satisfaction. But, in a religious who makes a particular profession of perfection and mortification, it is a much greater fault. "God," says Lactantius, "calls to life by labour: the devil, to death by delights." (Lib. vi. de Prov. cap. 18.) The Lord brings his servants to eternal life by mortification; but the devil leads sinners to everlasting death, by pleasure and self-indulgence.

7. Even works of piety must be accompanied with a spirit of detachment; so that whenever our efforts are unsuccessful, we will not be disturbed, and when our exercises of devotion are prohibited by the superior, we will give them up with cheerfulness. Self-attachment of every kind hinders a perfect

union with God. We must therefore seriously and firmly resolve to mortify our passions, and not to submit to be their slaves. External as well as interior mortification is necessary for perfection : but with this difference, that the former should be practised with discretion; the latter without discretion, and with fervour. What does it profit us to mortify the body while the passions of the heart are indulged ? “Of what use is it,” says St. Jerome, “to reduce the body by abstinence, if the soul is swelled with pride?—or to abstain from wine, and to be inebriated with hatred ?” (Epis. ad Lætanziám.) It is useless to chastise the body by fasting, while pride inflates the heart to such a degree, that we cannot bear a word of contempt, or the refusal of a request. In vain do we abstain from wine, while the soul is intoxicated with anger against all who thwart our designs, or oppose our inclinations. No wonder, then, that St. Bernard deplored the miserable state of religious who wear the external garb of humility, and, at the same time, inwardly cherish their passions. “They,” says the Saint, “are not divested of their vices—they only cover them by the outward sign of penance.”

8. By attention to the mortification of self-love we shall become saints in a short time, and without the risk of injury to health : for, since God is the only witness of interior acts, they will not expose us to the danger of being

puffed up with pride. Oh! what treasures of virtue and of merits are laid up by stifling, in their very birth, those little inordinate desires and affections; those bickerings; those suggestions of curiosity; those bursts of wit and humour; and all similar effects of self-love. When you are contradicted, give up your opinion with cheerfulness, unless the glory of God require that you maintain it. When feelings of self-esteem spring up in your heart, make a sacrifice of them to Jesus Christ. If you receive a letter, restrain your curiosity, and abstain from opening it for some time. If you desire to read the termination of an interesting narrative, lay aside the book, and defer the reading of it to another time. When you feel inclined to mirth, to pull a flower, or to look at any object, suppress these inclinations for the love of Jesus Christ, and deprive yourself, for his sake, of the pleasure of indulging them. A thousand acts of this kind may be performed in the day. Father Leonard of Port Maurice relates, that a servant of God performed eight acts of mortification in eating an egg, and that it was afterwards revealed to her, that, as the reward of her self-denial, eight degrees of grace, and as many degrees of glory, were bestowed upon her. It is also narrated of St. Dositheus, that, by similar mortifications of the interior, he arrived, in a short time, at a high degree of perfection. Though unable, in consequence of bodily infirmities, to fast, or to discharge the

other duties of the community, he attained so perfect an union with God, that the other monks, struck with wonder at his sublime sanctity, asked him what exercises of virtue he performed. "The exercise," replied the Saint, "to which I have principally attended, is the mortification of all selfwill."

9. Blessed Joseph Calas Sanctus used to say, that "*the day which is spent without mortification, is lost.*" To convince us of the necessity of mortification, the Redeemer has chosen a life of perfect self-denial, full of pains and ignominy, and destitute of all sensible pleasure. Hence, he is called by Isaias, "a man of sorrows." He might have saved the world, amid the enjoyment of honours and delights; but he preferred to redeem it by sorrows and contempt. "Who having joy set before him, endured the cross." (Heb. xii. 2.) To give us an example, he renounced the joy which was set before him, and embraced the cross. "*Reflect, again, and again,*" says St. Bernard, "*on the life of Jesus, and you will find him always on the cross.*" The Redeemer revealed to St. Catherine of Bologna that the sorrows of his passion commenced in his mother's womb. For his birth, he selected the season, the place, and the hour most calculated to excite pain. During life, he chose to be poor, unknown, despised: and, dying, he preferred the most painful, the most ignominious, and the most desolate of all sorts of death

which human nature could suffer. St. Catherine of Sienna used to say, that as a mother takes the bitterest medicine to restore the health of the infant she suckles, so Jesus Christ has assumed all the pains of life to heal the infirmities of his children.

10. Thus, he invites all his followers to accompany him to the mountain of myrrh; that is, of bitterness and of sorrows. "I will go to the mountain of myrrh." (Can. iv. 6.) "*Do you come,*" says St. Peter Damian, "*to Jesus crucified? If you do, you must come already crucified, or to be crucified.*" (Ser. 1, de exalt. S. cruce.) If, O sacred spouse, you come to embrace your crucified Saviour, you must bring with you a heart already crucified, or to be crucified. Speaking especially of his virginal spouses, Jesus Christ said to blessed Baptist Varani: "*The crucified Bridegroom, desires a crucified spouse.*" Hence, to be the true spouses of Jesus, religious must lead lives of continual mortification and self-denial. "Always bearing about in our body, the mortification of Jesus." (2 Cor. iv. 10.) They must never seek their own will or pleasure, in any action or desire, but the glory of Jesus Christ, crucifying, for his sake, all their inclinations. "*They that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.*" (Gal. v. 24.) Religious, if they expect to be recognised as the spouses of the Redeemer, must transfix all their passions.

11. Let us now see what are the means by which the spirit of interior mortification may be acquired. The first means is, to discover the passion which predominates in our heart, and which most frequently leads us into sin; and, then, to endeavour to conquer it. St. Gregory says, that, to overcome the devil, we must avail ourselves of the artifices by which he seeks our destruction. He labours continually to increase in us the violence of the passion to which we are most subject; and, we must direct our attention principally to the extirpation of that passion. Whoever subdues his predominate passion will easily conquer all other evil inclinations: but, he that is under its sway, can make no progress in perfection. *“Of what advantage,”* says St. Ephrem, *“are wings to the eagle when her foot is chained?”* Oh! how many religious are there who, like the royal eagle, are capable of lofty flights in the way of God, and who, because they are bound by earthly attachments, never advance in holiness. St. John of the cross says, that a slender thread is sufficient to fetter a soul who flies not with eagerness to her God. Besides, he that submits to the tyranny of any passion, not only does not go forward in the way of virtue, but is exposed to great danger of being lost. If a religious does not subdue her ruling passion, all other mortifications will be unprofitable. Some despise worldly riches, but are full of self-esteem. If they do not endeavour

to bear the humiliations which they receive, their contempt of mammon will profit them but little. Others, on the contrary, are patient and humble, but enslaved to the love of money. If they do not mortify the desire of wealth, their patience and humility in bearing with contempt, will be of little use to them.

12. Resolve, then, O sacred virgin, to subdue the evil inclination which is most predominant in your heart. A resolute will, aided by the grace of God, (which is never wanting,) conquers all difficulties. St. Francis de Sales was very prone to anger; but, by continual violence to himself, he became a model of meekness and of sweetness. We read in his life that he bore, without murmur or complaint, the injuries and calumnies which, to try his patience, were, by the divine permission, heaped upon him. As soon as one passion is subdued, we must endeavour to overcome the others: for, a single unmortified passion will be sufficient to lead the soul to destruction. St. Joseph Calas Sanctius asserts that, *while a single passion reigns in the heart, though all the others should have been extirpated, the soul shall never enjoy tranquillity.* "A ship," says St. Cyril, "however strong and perfect it may be, will be unsafe, while the smallest hole remains in the bottom." (Ap. S. Augus. Ep. 206.) And St. Augustine says: "Trample under foot passions already subdued, and transfix those that still offer resistance." (In

cap. 8, Rom.) If you wish to be a saint, I advise you to entreat the superior and director to point out the way in which you ought to walk. Tell them not to spare you, but to contradict your inclinations, as often as they shall judge it useful to you. "Be of an upright and perfect will," says that great servant of God, Cardinal Petrucci. St. Teresa relates, that she derived more advantage from one of her confessors, who sought on all occasions to oppose her desires, than from all the others. She adds, that she was frequently tempted to leave him; and that, as often as she yielded to the suggestion of the devil, God rebuked her severely. "*Every time,*" says the Saint, "*I resolved to leave him, I felt within me a rebuke more painful than the conduct of my confessor towards me.*"

13. The second means to *obtain the spirit of interior mortification* is, to resist the passions, and to beat them down before they acquire strength. If any of them become strong by habitual indulgence, the subjugation of it will be exceedingly difficult. "Lest cupidity," says St. Augustine, "should gain strength, strike it to the ground whilst it is weak." (In Ps. 136.) Sometimes it will happen that a religious will feel inclined to make use of an angry expression, or to entertain an affection for a certain person. If she do not resist these desires in the beginning, the slight wound, inflicted by her consent to



them, will soon become incurable. "Unless," says St. Ephrem, "you quickly take away the passions, they produce an ulcer." (De Perfec.) One of the ancient monks, as we learn from St. Dorotheus, (Serm. 11,) has beautifully illustrated this doctrine. He commanded one of his disciples to pluck up a young cypress: the disciple executed the command without difficulty. The superior, then, told him to pull up another tree of greater growth; to perform this task, all the strength of the young monk was necessary. Lastly, the venerable Father commanded the disciple to tear up a tree which had taken deep root. In obedience to this precept the young religious exerted all his strength; but his efforts were fruitless—the tree was immoveable. Behold, said the old man, how easily our passions are eradicated in the beginning, and how difficult it is to conquer them after they have acquired strength and vigour by evil habits. This truth is confirmed by daily experience. A religious, when she receives an insult, feels within a motion of resentment; if, in the beginning, she stifles the spark, and silently offers to God the sacrifice of her feelings, the fire is extinguished; she escapes unhurt; and even acquires merit before the Lord. But, if she yield to the impulse of passion; if she pause to reflect on the insult she has received, and manifest externally the feelings of her soul; that spark of resentment will soon be kindled into a flame of hatred,

Another religious entertains a certain little attachment towards a certain person; if, in the beginning, she avoid the company of that person, the affection will vanish; but, if she encourage the attachment, it will, in a short time, become sinful and mortal. We must therefore abstain with the greatest care from nourishing our passions—the monsters that would devour us.

14. The next means is, as Cassian says, to endeavour to change the object of our passions, that thus the pernicious and vicious desires of the heart may become salutary and holy. Some are inclined to an inordinate love of all from whom they receive a favour. They should seek to change the object of this propensity, and to turn their affections to God who is infinitely amiable, and who has bestowed the most inestimable blessings upon them. Others are prone to anger: they ought to direct their resentment against their own sins, which have done them more injury than all the devils in hell could inflict upon them. Others pant after honours and temporal goods: they should aspire to the goods and honours of God's eternal kingdom. But, to practise successfully this means of conquering our passions, frequent meditation on the truths of faith, frequent spiritual lectures, and frequent reflections on the eternal maxims, are indispensably necessary. And above all, it is necessary to impress deeply on the mind certain fundamental spiri-

tual maxims—such as : *God alone deserves to be loved : sin is the only evil which we ought to hate : whatever God wills is good : all worldly goods shall have an end : the most insignificant action, performed for God's sake, is more profitable than the conversion of the whole world effected from any other motive than the love of God ; it is necessary to do what, at the hour of death, we would wish to have done : we ought to live on this earth as if there were nothing in existence but ourselves and God.* He, whose mind is continually filled with holy maxims, suffers little molestation from earthly objects, and is always strong enough to resist his corrupt inclinations. The saints have kept their souls always occupied with the truths of eternity, and thus, in the time of temptation, have been almost insensible to the goods or the evils of this life. To conquer self-love, and to shake off the tyranny of passion, we must, above all things, pray without ceasing, and continually ask of God the assistance of his grace. He that prays obtains all God's gifts : “ For every one that asketh receiveth.” (Luke, xi, 10.) We ought especially to beg the gift of divine love : for, to him who loves God nothing is difficult. Meditation and reflection assist us greatly in the practice of virtue : but, in the observance of the divine commands, a single spark of the love of God affords more help than a thousand reflections and considerations. Acts of virtue which pro-

ceed from reflection, are accompanied with labour and violence; but, he that loves, is not fatigued by doing what pleases his beloved: "*He that loves labours not.*"

## PRAYER.

O my God, after so many graces, so many communions, and so many good examples of companions; after so many interior lights and loving invitations, my whole soul should, at this moment, be one flame of divine love. But, notwithstanding all your favours, I am still as imperfect, and miserable as ever. Nothing has been wanting on your part: the fault is entirely mine, and is to be ascribed to the obstacles which I have opposed to your grace by obeying my passions. I see, O my Jesus, that my life has not given glory to you, but has rather brought dishonour on your name, by exhibiting to others one of your spouses so attached to the world and to herself. You have taken me from the world, and I have loved it more than even seculars. O Lord, have mercy upon me: do not abandon me, for I desire to amend. I repent, with my whole heart, of all the insults which, for the indulgence of my pleasures, I have offered to you. I desire to begin to love you from this moment. I have abused your patience too long: but now I love you with my whole soul. From this day forward, you shall be the only object of my affections. I desire to leave all, and to

do every thing in my power to please you. Shew me your will, and assist me to execute it: I am ready to please you in all things. Do not permit me to be any longer insensible to the excessive love by which you have obliged me to love you. I am willing to be deprived of every earthly consolation, and to suffer every cross which you will please to send me. Dispose of me as you please. I desire and hope to belong to you entirely and for ever. I desire you alone, and nothing more. Mary, my mother, beg of your Son to hear me: for he denies you nothing.

## SECTION I.

### *On detachment from selfwill.*

NOTHING is more injurious to religious who have consecrated their will to Jesus Christ, than to be guided by the dictates of selfwill. Hence, to guard against selfwill—one of the worst enemies of the spirit, the founders of every religious order have prescribed, in their constitutions, the vow of obedience. Nothing but selfwill can separate us from God. Neither all the men upon earth, nor all the devils in hell, can deprive us of his grace. “Let selfwill cease,” says St. Bernard, “and there will be no hell.” (*De ord. vitæ.*) Let men give up their own wills, and, for them, there shall be no hell. It is selfwill that destroys all virtues. St. Peter Damian calls it “the great destroyer of all virtues;” and St. Anselm says, that “the will of God is the fountain of all good, and the will of man the source of all evil.” And, what fruit can be expected from the disciple who chooses a master destitute of reason? “Whoever,” says St. Bernard, “constitutes himself his own master, becomes the disciple of a fool.” St. Antony used to

say, that self-love is that wine which inebriates man, so as to render him incapable of comprehending the value of virtue, or evil of sin.

2. St. Augustine asserts, that "the devil has been made a devil by selfwill." It is principally by selfwill that satan seeks to effect the perdition of religious. Cassian relates, that the Abbot Achilles, being asked by his disciples with what arms the devil fights against religious, replied, that he employs pride against the great; avarice against merchants; intemperance against youth; but, that his principal weapons against religious, are, their own wills; that, with these he attacks, and frequently defeats them. The Abbot Pastor says, that "the demons do not contend with us when our wills become devils." (Apud. Ruf. lib. 3.) When we do our own will, the enemy ceases to combat us: because then our wills are devils, and more injurious to us than all the devils in hell. St. John Climacus (quoted by Gerson,) says, that he who, despising the authority of his superior, wishes to direct himself, does not require a devil to tempt him; because, he is become a devil to himself. (Gers. de vis. cap. 3.)

3. "Go not," says the Holy Ghost, "after thy lusts, but turn from thy own will." (Eccl. xviii. 30.) Do not follow your own desires, but fly from the indulgence of selfwill. This precept is directed, in a particular manner, to religious who have sacrificed their wills to God,

by promising obedience to their rule and to their superior. As God should be the only object of their affection, so obedience is the only means by which they can obtain his love. To be the fruit of obedience is the highest perfection which the actions of religious can attain. The venerable Catherine of Cardona, having left the Spanish court, retired into a desert, where she lived for many years in the practice of penitential austerities, the very recital of which would fill the mind with horror. In her life, it is related that, seeing one day a Carmelite Friar carrying through obedience a bundle of wood, and knowing by inspiration that he murmured interiorly against the command of his superior, she thus addressed him: "Brother, carry with alacrity these fagots: and be assured, that, by this act of obedience, you shall merit a greater reward than I have deserved by all my penances." But, as the works of religious derive from obedience the highest degree of perfection, so by selfwill they are rendered most imperfect and defective. Hence Trite-mius says, that nothing is more hateful to the devil than the practice of obedience. "The devil detests nothing more than obedience." (In prol. Reg. S. Bon.) Speaking of obedience, St. Teresa says, "that satan knows that it is the remedy of the soul, and therefore he labours hard to prevent its attainment." When St. Francis de Sales was devising the rules for



the nuns of the Visitation, a certain person said that they ought to be barefooted. "You," replied the saint, "wish to commence with the feet, but I will begin with the head." St. Philip Neri continually impressed on his penitents that sanctity consists in the mortification of selfwill. "You will," says St. Jerome, "advance in proportion as you deny your own will." Your progress in virtue will be proportional to your denial of selfwill. It was, because they knew that they could not offer to God a more agreeable sacrifice than that of their own wills by the vow of obedience, that so many priests and bishops, who led exemplary lives in the world, retired into the cloister to live under obedience.

4. O how happy the religious who, at the hour of death, can say with the Abbot John, "*I have never done my own will.*" St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzis used to say, that the only means of dying a happy death is to submit with simplicity to the direction of a superior. "To crucify all her desires is," says Cassian, "the end of a religious." The religious, then, who does not attend to the mortification of selfwill, cannot be called a religious, but a sacrilegious violator of her profession. What greater sacrilege than to take back the will which has been once consecrated to God? "*There is not,*" says St. Bernard, "*a more heinous sacrilege, than to resume power over a will once offered to God.*" The Holy Ghost

has declared, by the mouth of Samuel, that to violate obedience, and to follow self-will in contempt of authority, is a species of idolatry. "It is like the sin of witchcraft, to rebel; and like the crime of idolatry, to refuse to obey." (1 Kings, xv. 23.) St. Gregory applies this passage, in a particular manner, to the disobedience of religious. "It is," says the Saint, "like the sin of witchcraft to rebel, because they believe the inventions of their own pride, and resist the counsels of their prelates." (S. Greg. in loc. cit.) The sin of religious who despise the commands of superiors, and follow the dictates of self-love, is like the crime of idolatry; because they, in a manner, adore self-will as their God. Hence St. Basil ordained, that monks who were attached to their own wills, should, like lepers, be separated from the rest of the community, lest others might be infected by their bad example.

5. Blessed Charlotte used to say, that the mortification of self-will is more meritorious than the renunciation of all the riches of the world. And here it is right to observe, that sanctity depends on the abnegation of self-will, not only in what is imperfect or indifferent, but also in the exercises which are in themselves holy; as, for example, prayer, almsdeeds, acts of penance, and other works of piety. Cassian remarks, that acts of virtue performed through self-will and disobedience, are productive of the worst consequences: because, sinful actions

which wear the appearance of holiness, are corrected only with the greatest difficulty. "*Vices*," he says, "*which appear to be virtues, are the most irremediable.*" (Cass. Coll. iv. cap. 20.) Religious who desire to attain sanctity by following self-will, are to be numbered among those unhappy souls who, on the day of judgment, will say to Jesus Christ: "*Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded?*" (Is. lviii. 3.) To them the Judge will answer, that their works were performed to please themselves rather than to do the will of God, and that therefore they deserve no reward. "*Behold*," he will say, "*in the day of your fast your own will is found.*" (Ibid.) Oh! how great, then, is the evil of self-will which vitiates and destroys the most perfect actions. "*Great*," says Bernard, "*is the evil of self-will, which renders your good works unprofitable to you.*" But, on the other hand, to be the result of obedience, is an infallible sign that an action is pleasing to God. Nicéphorus relates, that when the superiors of St. Simon Stylites wished to ascertain if his extraordinary and singular mode of life were pleasing to God, they commanded him to come down from his pillar and to live with the other monks. On hearing the precept, the saint instantly stretched out his foot to descend, but was told by his superiors to persevere in his austerities, which he proved by his obedience to be acceptable before God. It is

necessary, then, to seek even holy things without attachment to self-will. St. Francis de Sales used to say: "*I desire but a few things; and for these I am not solicitous.*" He wished for them, not through self-love, but to please God, and was therefore prepared to give them up as soon as he knew they were not conformable to the holy will of God.

6. O how great is the peace of a religious whose desires are the dictates of obedience. St. Dositheus having consecrated his whole will to obedience, enjoyed continual peace. Fearing that, in this peace, there was some delusion of the enemy, he one day said to his superior, St. Dorotheus: "*Father, tell me why it is, that I experience such tranquillity as to be free from every earthly desire?*" "*My son,*" replied the Father, "*this peace is altogether the fruit of obedience.*" And what can make religious more content than to know, with certainty, that in all their actions they do the will of God? They can say with the Prophet: "We are happy, O Israel! because the things that are pleasing to God, are made known to us." (Bar. iv. 4.) We enjoy constant happiness; because, being obedient in all things, we are certain of doing in all the will of our Spouse. "*Oh! what sweetness,*" says Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, "*is contained in this single word—the will of God.*" St. Peter Damian says, that "*he who has rejected his own will, has thrown off a most grievous*

*burden. "What tyrant,"* continues the Saint, *"more cruel than self-will?"* A religious cannot be subject to a more galling tyranny than the domination of her own will: for, her inclinations will lead her to seek after things which cannot be had in the cloister; fruitless desires will keep her in perpetual misery and agitation of mind, and she shall suffer within herself a little hell; "Of what use," says St. Eutichius, "are the silence and repose of a habitation, if the inhabitants be disturbed by the struggling of passions? ... Of what use is external serenity, if the tempest rage within?" (Hom. 9, ad monac.) What will it profit a religious to live in the retirement of the cloister, if her heart be agitated by the violence of her passions?—without, indeed, there will be a calm; but within a storm.

7. And from what source arise all our troubles? Do they not spring from attachment to our own inclinations? "*Whence,*" says St. Bernard, *"is disturbance of mind, if not from following self-will?"* Cassian relates, that the ancient Fathers were accustomed to say that the religious who does not conquer self-will, cannot persevere in religion: certainly, she cannot persevere with profit and with peace. Attachment to self-will is the only reason why many religious lead an unhappy life. One is unhappy, because she cannot have the confessor or the superior of her choice: another, because she desires an office, and it is

not given to her. She is so discontented, that the superiors, to put an end to her complaints, accede to her wishes; and still she is not content. How can she expect to enjoy peace, when, instead of practising obedience, she obliges her superiors to submit to her desires. Others are disturbed, because an occupation, opposed to their inclinations, is assigned to them: others, because they are forbidden to keep up a certain communication or correspondence with their friends. Others, because some disagreeable precept is imposed upon them: they are displeased, and endeavour to excite against the superior the aversion of their relatives, and even of the community, and thus produce endless scandal and disorder. Their crime would merit the chastisement of two monks, who refused to receive as their abbot a holy man called Philibert: one of them was struck with lightning, the other suddenly attacked with a mortal disease. "*Have peace with your prelates,*" says St. Bernard: "*do not detract, nor wilfully listen to others detracting them: for, God punishes inferiors, in a special manner, for this vice, and even in the present life.*" (Opusc. ad quid ven.) And St. Gregory says, that "the works of superiors, though they may appear reprehensible, are not to be struck with the sword of the tongue." (In registror. lib. xii. c. 3.) "Thou shalt not," says the Lord, "speak ill of the Gods." (Exod. xxii. 28.) You shall not censure the

conduct of your superiors, who hold the place of God in your regard.

8. Attend to what Mary Magdalen, while in an ecstasy, said of the evil done to religious by self-love: "*I see,*" says that great Saint, "*a multitude of souls among whom there is one who, at the time of communion, is wholly recollected; but before the lapse of an hour, something occurs which is opposed to her inclinations, and she is thrown into confusion and agitation. I see another who, during the holy Mass, burns with divine love; but, when reminded of a fault, she will not acknowledge it: in her, pride and self-love reign. Another appears to rival St. Anthony by the rigour of her austerities; but, if her penances be prohibited, she is pertinacious, and will not obey. Another is reserved and mortified in the refectory; but she takes complacency in her mortifications, and desires to be esteemed more holy than her companions. In discretion, she perceives excess; and imputes to immoderate zeal the absence of any thing which she desires. Another will appear in the parlour, to surpass St. Augustine by her wisdom; and, to manifest her own perfection, will exhibit, in her conversation, an extraordinary degree of prudence. Others are ready to forego, in the exercises of charity, every personal advantage, but wish to be thanked for their services, and to be praised by all their companions.*" Of such religious, the Lord once said to the same saint: "*They*

*desire my spirit, but they desire it in a manner, and at a time pleasing to themselves, and thus become unfit to receive it."*

9. But, let us return to ourselves. If you, O blessed sister, wish to become a saint, seek to overcome, as much as possible, your own will; adopt the rule of religious who love perfection; never do any thing for your own satisfaction; but, do all to please God: by this means you cut off all vain desires, and all evil inclinations. Worldlings continually seek the gratification of their own wishes; but the saints constantly endeavour to mortify self-will, and to find occasions of self-denial. St. Andrew Avellini, as we read in his office, bound himself by an express vow to resist continually his own will. You should, at least, prescribe to yourself to deny your own will a certain number of times in the day. Repeat often the words by which St. Bernard was accustomed to excite his fervour in God's service: "Bernard, for what purpose have you come here?" Say to yourself: have I entered religion to do my own will? If I wished to live according to my own inclinations, I should have remained in the world. At my profession, I consecrated my will to God by the vow of obedience: why should I now seek to indulge it? Why am I disturbed when not permitted to follow my own will? Be not troubled, then, when your requests are refused, and when a duty painful to self-love is imposed upon you: but remember,



that by your obedience you will merit a greater reward, and will make greater progress in virtue, than you would, by many spontaneous acts of penance and devotion. A great servant of God used to say, that to perform a single act of abnegation of self-will, is more profitable than to build a thousand hospitals. Have continually before your eyes the words of the venerable Father Anthony Torres, to a religious who was one of his penitents: "*A soul entirely consecrated to God, loves nothing; wants nothing; seeks nothing; desires nothing.*"

10. I will conclude this chapter by an extract from a letter of the same venerable author, to a religious whom he wished to detach from herself and from all created objects, and whom he exhorted to dedicate herself entirely to God: "*Since the Lord gives you so many occasions of suffering and of desolation, endeavour to improve in charity, which is said to be as strong as death. Study to strengthen divine love in your soul, so that it may disengage your heart from all creatures, from all human respect, from all that is prized by the world, from your own desires, and from all self-love; that there may be nothing in you to prevent your thoughts, your desires, and your affections, from being entirely directed to your beloved. Let the heart sigh after the beloved; let the will rest only on him: let the thoughts be wholly fixed on him. Let every motion of*

*the body, let every act of your life, be for and with the beloved. To attain the love of your beloved, I advise you to renounce, every day before the crucifix, every object of your affections, all honours, interests, consolations, and relatives, and to protest that you desire no other glory than his ignominies; no riches but his charity; no other convenience than the cross; that you desire him only, your dear and beloved Spouse. When you walk in the garden, or look up to the heavens, invite frequently and with your whole heart, all creatures to the love of your beloved. Avoid all conversation; give up every employment which is not pleasing to him; omit every action which will not redound to the glory of your Spouse."*

#### PRAYER.

Ah, my God, my Lord, and my Spouse! you have loved me so much, and have given me a will to love you, and I have so often employed this will in offending and insulting you. If I were not convinced that you are a God of infinite mercy, I should lose all hope of recovering your grace which I have unfortunately lost. By my ingratitude, I deserved to have been long since abandoned by you. But, I see that your light still assists me, and I know that you still call me your love. Behold, O Lord, I do not wish to continue any longer in my ingratitude, or to resist any longer your invitation. I offer to you my whole

being: receive an unfaithful soul who, for so many years, has despised your love, but who now desires to love you, and to belong entirely to you. Assist me, O my Jesus; give me a sorrow for my sins, which will fill my soul with pain and anguish for having outraged so good and so amiable a God. Unhappy me, if, after the lights which you now give me, I betray you again. How can you bear with me any longer? The fear of again offending you afflicts my soul. Ah, Lord! do not permit me to be evermore separated from you. Chastise me as you please, but not by permitting me to lose your grace. If you see that I shall ever turn my back upon you, take me out of life, at this moment, in which I hope to enjoy your friendship. Of what use will life be to me, if, by living, I continue to offend you? O Mary, my hope, obtain for me the grace of perseverance; or of instant death.

## SECTION II.

### *On obedience.*

"Since," as St. Bonaventure says, "*all the perfection of religious consists in the destruction of self-will,*" obedience should of all virtues be the most dear to a religious. Obedience to rule and to the commands of superiors is the greatest sacrifice which a Christian can offer to God: because, as St. Thomas says, "nothing is more amiable in the eyes of man, than the liberty of his own will." (Opusc. 18, de perf. c. 10.) Hence, we cannot present to God a more acceptable gift, than the consecration of our wills to his service. "For," says the Holy Ghost, "obedience is better than sacrifices." (1 Kings, xv. 22.) Obedience is more pleasing to God, than all the sacrifices we can offer to him. They who give to the Lord their worldly goods, by almsdeeds; their honour, by embracing contempt; and their body, by mortification, by fasts, and by works of penance; make only a partial consecration of themselves to him. But he that offers to God the sacrifice of his own will by the practice of obedience, consecrates all that he possesses to God's

glory, and can say: Lord, after having given to you my will, I have nothing more to present to you. Besides, as St. Gregory says, "by the other virtues, we give to God what belongs to us; but by obedience, we dedicate ourselves to him." (Lib. vi. in Reg. c. 2.) The same Father says, in another place, that "*obedience is a virtue which infuses the other virtues into the mind, and preserves them in the soul.*" (Mor. lib. xxxv. c. 22.) St. Teresa asserts, that, "*from a soul resolved to love God, he requires nothing but obedience:*" and again—that "*the devil knows well that obedience is the remedy of the soul; and, therefore he labours hard to prevent its attainment.*"

2. The venerable Father Sertorio Caputo used to say, that obedience merits even the reward of martyrdom; because, as by martyrdom a Christian submits, for God's sake, to the loss of life, so by obedience he offers to the Lord the sacrifice of self-will, which is, as it were, the head of the soul. Hence the wise man says, that he who practises obedience shall conquer every enemy. "An obedient man shall speak of victory." (Prov. xxi. 28.) Yes, says St. Gregory, the obedient shall overcome all the temptations of hell; because, by obedience they subject their will to men, and thus become superior to the devils who fell through disobedience. "*They who obey,*" says the Saint, "*are conquerors; because, when they submit their will to others, they triumph*

*over the angels who sinned by disobedience."* (Lib. iv. in lib. reg. c. 10.) Cassian observes, that since all vices proceed from self-will, when the latter is destroyed, the former die in the soul. "*By mortification of the will, all vices wither and decay.*" "If," says the Lord, "thou turn away from doing thy own will \* \* \* I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob." (Isa. lviii. 13.) St. Lawrence Justinian teaches, that all who sacrifice their own will to God, become so dear to him, that they shall obtain whatever they ask. "*He that has consecrated himself to God by the immolation of self-will, will receive all that he shall demand.*"

3. St. Augustine says, that after Adam had, by his disobedience, entailed misery on himself and the whole human race, the Son of God became man, principally to teach us obedience by his own example. Jesus, from his infancy, began to obey Mary and Joseph: he continued to obey his mother during his life; and, by his obedience, was, in the end, brought to the ignominious death of the cross. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death—even to the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 8.) St. Bernard says, that "the disobedient seek to be exempted from obedience. Jesus Christ did not do so: he, indeed, gave his life lest he should violate obedience." (Ep. xli.) The mother of God once revealed to one of her

servants, that our Redeemer died with a special affection for obedient souls.

4. The venerable Father Leonard, founder of the order of the mother of God, being importuned by his disciples to give them a rule, wrote this single word—*obedience*. He wished by this act to shew them that, in religion, obedience and sanctity are identical; that to be obedient and to be a saint are one and the same thing. St. Thomas teaches, that it is principally by the vow of obedience a Christian is made a religious; and, according to St. Teresa, a religious who is not obedient cannot be called a religious. Of what use is a disobedient nun? Many are versed in the belles-lettres, in poetry, foreign languages, and in history, but are unacquainted with obedience. A religious, who knows not how to obey, knows nothing.

5. St. Teresa used to say that obedience is the short road to perfection. It is related, in the lives of the Fathers, that one of them saw in a vision two orders of saints: the first consisted of those who had left the world, and retired into the desert, to practise continual prayer and penance; the second, of those who, for the love of Jesus Christ, lived in obedience and subjection to the will of others. He also saw that the latter enjoyed greater glory than the former: for, although the solitaries had pleased God in all their exercises, still they had always done their own will: but, they

who lived under obedience, had given their will to God, and thus offered to him the most acceptable of all sacrifices. St. Dorotheus relates that his disciple, St. Dositheus, being weak in health, could not practise the exercises performed by the other monks, but cast off self-will and consecrated himself entirely to obedience. He died in the space of five years. After his death, the Lord revealed to the abbot, that this young man obtained the same reward as St. Paul, the first hermit, and as St. Antony, the abbot. The monks were amazed, and could not conceive how Dositheus, who did not perform the ordinary duties of his state, could merit such exalted glory. Almighty God told them, that the glory of the young saint was the reward of the obedience which he had practised. St. Jerome says, that "a repast of precept deserves a greater reward than fasting voluntarily undertaken." (Lib. vi. in reg. c. 2.) To eat through obedience, is more meritorious in the sight of God, than to fast through self-will. The same truth was revealed by the Blessed Virgin to St. Bridget. Being prohibited by her confessor to practise her accustomed penances, the saint began to apprehend a diminution of her fervour: but the mother of God encouraged her to obey without fear, by saying to her, that "they who do penance deserve but one reward, while he that omits, through obedience, one act of mortification, receives a twofold remuneration; one, for



the penance which he wished to perform ; another, for his obedience in omitting it." (Rev. cap. 26.)

6. St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say, that an obedient religious is the precious gem of the convent. Oh ! if all nuns were obedient, every convent would be a paradise. Besides, a nun faithful to obedience, lays up in every action an immense treasure of merit : because, in every exercise she does the will of God ; and in doing his will all merit consists. To enable us to acquire eternal treasures, by whatever we do through obedience, is the principal advantage of the religious state. Even duties agreeable to our own feelings, when performed through a motive of obedience, merit a great reward. St. Lewis Gonzaga used to say, that religion is a ship, in which even he who labours not, makes the voyage. Yes ; for a religious merits, not only when she fasts, or prays, or recites the office, but also, when, through obedience, she takes repose or abstains from labour ; when she eats or indulges in recreation. Oh ! how profitable and meritorious is every act performed in obedience to the will of superiors.

7. If, then, blessed sister, you desire to become a saint, consecrate yourself entirely to obedience ; divest yourself of all self-will ; and endeavour, with all your might, to obey your rule and your superior in the external exercises, and your spiritual Father in whatever regards

the interior. It is by obedience, and by the absence of self-will, that perfect religious are distinguished from the imperfect. The latter do nothing cheerfully, but what pleases self-love and self-will. They, indeed, desire to be entrusted with some of the offices of the community, because, to be without office, they deem to be dishonourable. But they wish for those employments that tend to their own ease and convenience; and, in every thing else, they seek their own will. In a word, they desire to become saints, but only according to their caprice, and according to the dictates of self-love. But, St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say, that *"he who, in serving God, seeks his own ease, serves himself, and not God."* But religious who love perfection, do not act in this manner: they never omit what obedience commands, and desire only what obedience prescribes. Imitate their example, and you shall become a saint. Endeavour to perform all your actions from a motive of obedience, and you will always walk securely to salvation. To secure their profits, merchants obtain an ensurance of their property. Let it be your care to make sure your eternal gain by procuring for every work the ensurance of obedience—the approbation of your superiors: otherwise, your works may prove injurious, or at least unprofitable to you. When St. Anselm was made Archbishop of Canterbury, he became unhappy in consequence of being

so free from the yoke of obedience; and, at his own solicitation, the Pope appointed for the saint, a superior whom he might obey. The saint regulated his conduct by the advice of the superior, and undertook nothing without his consent. How much more should you who, by your profession, have consecrated your will to obedience; how much more, I say, should you seek occasions of practising that sublime virtue.

#### PRAYER.

Ah! my Jesus, to save me you have been obedient unto death—even the death of the cross: and I, for a vile and wretched gratification, have been so often disrespectful and disobedient to you. Wait, O Lord; do not abandon me yet. I repent with my whole soul, of all the offences I have offered to you. I now see that I have abused your mercy too much, and that therefore I am undeserving of your pity. But I also see that you have borne with me till now, that, entering one day into myself, I might consecrate my whole being to you. I hope the day has arrived when I shall dedicate myself entirely to your love. I hear your voice calling me to your love: I shall no longer resist your invitation. Behold! I offer myself to you: refuse not, O Lord, my oblation. Tell me what you require of me: I am ready to do all in my power to please you. I promise you that henceforth I shall never violate the obe-

dience due to my superiors. I love you, my Jesus ; and because I love you, I desire to do all that I can to please you. Assist me, O Lord ; draw and unite me more and more every day to your love. Eternal Father, I offer to you the passion of your Son, and through his merits, I beseech you to give me all the graces necessary to make me a saint, such as you wish me to be. O Mary, my mother and my hope, beg of your Son, that I may be no longer mine, but that I may belong to him entirely and for ever.

### SECTION III.

#### *On the obedience due to superiors.*

1. THE principal and most efficacious means of practising the obedience due to superiors, and of rendering it meritorious before God, is to consider that, in obeying them, we obey God himself; and that by despising their commands, we despise the authority of our divine Master, who has said of superiors: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me." (Luc. x. 16.) Hence, St. Paul addressed to his disciples the following words: "Not serving to the eye; as it were pleasing men; but, as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." (Ephe. vi. 6.) When, then, a religious receives a precept from her prelate, superior, or confessor, she should immediately execute it, not only to please men, but principally to please God, whose will is made known to her by their command. In obeying their directions, she is more certain of doing the will of God, than if an angel came down from heaven to manifest his will to her. Hence St. Paul says in his epistle to the Galatians, that though an angel

from heaven preach a gospel to you, besides that which the Apostles preach, he should not be believed: No, says the Apostle, "let him be anathema." (C. i. 8.)

2. St. Bernard says, that "God deigns to make prelates his own equals." He takes to himself the reverence or contempt manifested to him. Obedience shewn to superiors is shewn to God; for he has said: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me." (Lib. iii. de Dis. & Præc.) Bear, then, always in mind, O blessed sister, that the obedience which you practise towards your superiors is paid to God himself. Now, if Jesus Christ himself came down from heaven, and imposed any duty upon you, or gave you any particular charge, would you attempt to decline it?—or would you dare to disobey his commands? "But," continues St. Bernard, "whether God, or a creature who is his representative, impose a precept, they are both to be obeyed with equal exactness." (Loco. cit.) If then you receive a command from one who holds the place of God, you should observe it with the same diligence as if it came from God himself. St. John Climacus (Gradu. iv.) relates that, in a certain monastery, the superior, to set an example to the community, commanded, in their presence, an old man of eighty years to stand in the refectory for two hours without interruption. The aged monk being asked how he had been able to bear this mor-

tification, replied: "I imagined that I stood before Jesus Christ, and that he imposed on me that humiliation; and this thought made me obey without difficulty or repugnance."

3. For our greater merit, the Lord wishes to lead us to salvation by means of faith, and therefore does not speak to us himself, but manifests his will by the commands of our superiors. When Jesus appeared to St. Paul, and transformed him into a new man, he might, in person, have directed the apostle what to do. But Jesus only said to him: "Go into the city, and there it will be told to thee what thou must do." (Acts, ix. 7.) Go into the city, and Ananias will make known my will to you. Hence blessed Egidius used to say, that it is more meritorious to obey man for the love of God, than to obey God himself. It may be added, that there is more certainty of doing the will of God by obedience to superiors, than by obedience to Jesus Christ, should he appear in person, and give his commands. Because, should Jesus Christ appear to a religious, she would not be certain whether it was he that spoke, or an evil spirit, who, under the appearance of the Redeemer, wished to deceive her. But, when her superiors speak, she knows for certain, from the words of Jesus Christ, that in obeying them she obeys him. "He," says our Lord, "that heareth you, heareth me." Even when it is doubtful, whether the object of a precept is conformable to the law of God,

the generality of theologians and masters of spiritual life teach, that a religious is bound to obey; and that in obeying, she is certain of not sinning, and of even doing the will of God. Attend to the doctrine of St. Bernard, which he has taken from the rule of St. Benedict: "Whatever," says the Saint, "a man, holding the place of God, commands, unless it be certain that it is displeasing to God, is to be received as if commanded by God himself." (Lib. iii. de dis.)

4. Thus, on the day of judgment, religious will be charged with every act of disobedience: but, as St. Philip Neri used to say, they shall be most certain of not having to render an account of the actions performed through obedience. For these, the superiors only who commanded them, shall be held accountable. Speaking particularly of nuns, the Lord said once to St. Catherine of Sienna: "Religious will not be obliged to render an account to me of what they do through obedience: for that, I will demand an account from the superiors." "Obey," says the Apostle, "your prelates, and be subject to them: for they watch as being to render an account of your souls: that they may do this with joy and not with grief." (Heb. xiii. 17.) And, O blessed spouse of the Lord, if you practise obedience, when, after death, you shall be asked by Jesus Christ, why you have not done greater penance?—why you have not made more prayer?—or



why you have performed such an action?— you can answer with confidence, that, in all this, you only fulfilled his commands, by obeying your superiors, whom he commanded you to obey as you would obey himself; and, that if you have done wrong, the blame is imputable to your superiors whose authority you obeyed.

5. Attend to the words of St. Paul: “That they (your prelates) may do this with joy, and not with grief.” (Loco. cit.) From this passage it clearly appears, that it is the duty of a religious to obey promptly, without reply, and without thwarting her superiors or disturbing their peace. Oh! how miserable is the condition of a superior whose subjects violate obedience by excuses, by coloured pretexts, by complaints, and even by murmurings. The situation of Abbesses, at the approach of the time for distributing the offices of the community, is truly deserving of pity. They are, on the one hand, troubled by scruples arising from the apprehension that, through human respect, or through the fear of displeasing a sister, they will entrust her with a charge for which she is unfit: and, on the other, they are afflicted to find that, after the distribution, one declines her office; another complains; a third murmurs; and others positively refuse to accept the duties assigned to them. This state of things compels the superior to dispense the offices, not according to the rules of reason,

and for the good of the community, but according to human prudence. In acting according to the dictates of human wisdom to prevent greater evils, the superior may be blameless: but whoever accepts or discharges her duties not in the spirit of obedience, but through caprice, will certainly be inexcusable. The Apostle commands you to obey and to be subject to your superiors, that they may discharge their duty with joy and not with grief. "For," says St. Paul, "this is not expedient for you." (Heb. xiii. 17.) No, it is not expedient for you that the superiors be resisted and thwarted; but, if they be supported and consoled in the government of the community, good order and your spiritual progress will be promoted.

6. O what a scandal is it to see certain religious decline certain offices assigned to them, and thus extort obedience from their superiors. St. Bernard, in his comment on the words of the Redeemer to the blind man—"What wilt thou that I do to thee"—says: "He was truly blind, otherwise he would have exclaimed: far be it from me, O Lord, to ask you to do what I will: tell me rather what thou wilt have me do for thee." Let us apply to ourselves this passage of St. Bernard. There are some nuns whom the abbess must ask what office they will undertake. Perfect religious do not require to be consulted about the office they wish for: should the superior ask

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them what charge would be most agreeable to them, they answer that it is not for them to say what employment they desire, but, that it belongs to her to tell them what she will have them do.

7. If then, blessed sister, you wish to be truly obedient, and truly religious, bear continually in mind that your superiors hold in your regard the place of Jesus Christ; and endeavour to shew them all the veneration and love that are due to his representatives, not through a feeling of self-interest; not to be esteemed by them, or to avoid their censure; but from the sole motive of pleasing God. And this obedience is due not only to the prelate and abbess, but to all that hold office in the convent; such as the Infirmarian, the Sacristan, and the sister who is charged with the care of the refectory. In obeying the abbess, a religious may be easily influenced by human respect; but, in obeying sisters entrusted with the inferior offices, she shews that she possesses the true spirit of obedience. St. Francis of Assisium thanked God in a particular manner, for having given him the grace to be always ready to obey the least of the novices, in all things in which they might be appointed his superior. The saint was accustomed to say, that the less the authority of a superior, and the more humble his station and qualifications, the greater is the merit of obedience; because, then it proceeds from the sole motive of pleasing God.

8. Secondly, do not seek the society of imperfect sisters who have little affection for obedience. Thirdly, receive correction with humility; beg of the superior to reprimand you as often as reproof may be necessary for you. Be not of the number of those who resent every even the slightest rebuke, to whom the superior cannot give even the necessary admonitions without the greatest caution; whose correction, lest they should be wanting in respect to her, and should disturb the community, she is compelled to defer for several months till a seasonable opportunity occurs. But, wo to the religious who cannot be admonished without such caution: she must be very imperfect indeed. Fourthly, when corrected, receive the admonition with humility and without excusing your fault; and should the superior charge you with a defect which you had not committed, do not speak of her mistake, unless she command you to state your guilt or innocence. But I shall hereafter treat this subject more at large.

9. Fifthly, banish from your mind all thoughts and suspicions against the superior, with the same promptness as if they were thoughts opposed to chastity. And when you hear any one attribute to her a fault which cannot be denied, seek to excuse her as much as you can. Oh! how scandalous is it to see certain religious who, instead of venerating their superior, search into all her actions, for

the purpose of depressing her character in the estimation of their companions, and of holding her up as an object of derision! But, should the fault of the superior be evident and inexcusable; for example, were she impatient with all the sisters, persuade yourself that God permits this defect in her, not for your injury, but for your profit. St. Gertrude once besought the Lord to deliver the Abbess from the fault of frequent impatience. In answer, she was told that he permitted this defect in the Abbess as well for her own advantage, as for the good of the religious: for her good, that she might be kept humble; for the good of the religious, that by bearing with her impatience, their merit might be increased. "The more," says St. Bernard, "you are oppressed, the more you gain." The greater the burden you bear, the greater the merit you acquire. St. Gregory teaches, that "the commands of superiors should be respected, though their life be not deserving of praise." (In 1 Reg. 2.) And speaking of the Scribes and Pharisees who blasphemed his works, Jesus Christ says: "All things whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do: but according to their works do ye not." (Mat. xxiii. 3.)

10. With regard to the offices of the convent, observe the excellent rule of St. Francis of Sales—"never to seek, and never to refuse any of them." Prefer always that which is least honourable, and least suited to your con-

venience. Few nuns merit the full reward of obedience by fulfilling the duties of their office, because few accept and discharge them in the true spirit of obedience, and with a pure intention of pleasing God. Imperfect religious only look to the advantages and disadvantages of office; but the perfect regard only the will of God, and therefore seek not their own ease or convenience, but cheerfully embrace pains and labours. It is your duty to endeavour to belong to the number of the perfect. Do not imagine that the refusal of office, through fear of committing faults in the discharge of its duties, will be excusable before God: but, be persuaded, that, by becoming a religious, you bound yourself to serve the convent. Could the fear of committing faults justify you in declining a charge, the same fear would exempt all the sisters from the obligation of accepting office. Should they give way to such fears, who would serve the monastery, or support the community? Have a pure intention of pleasing God: fear not, he will assist you.

11. Accept in the spirit of obedience, the office entrusted to you; and in accepting it, regard not the power of domination; look not to self-ease nor self-esteem, but solely to the obligations of obedience. Accept it with a holy confidence, and listen not to the devil who will perhaps suggest to you that the duties of such an office are above your strength. If you

be obedient, the Lord will give you that strength which you do not possess. Do not imagine that, because the duties of your charge are of a distracting nature, they will destroy in your soul, the spirit of recollection. Be assured that, if you comply with your duties, God will bestow upon you more graces in a quarter of an hour spent in prayer, than, without performing them, you would receive in a retreat of ten days. In the fulfilment of your office, endeavour as much as possible to set apart some little time to recollect yourself in prayer. Do not say that your office requires every moment of your time; perfect religious who have an affection for prayer, can find abundant time for the discharge of their duties and for recollection. It is your duty not to imitate the conduct of some who burden themselves with such a multiplicity of occupations, that they cannot find a moment's time to recollect themselves before God. In discharging the duties of office, be careful not to be partial to your friends. Be still more careful not to abuse your office by employing it as a means of procuring for yourself advantages which the other sisters do not enjoy.

2. Lastly, remember that neither obedience, nor even the perfection of obedience, forbids a religious to make known to her superiors, all secret disqualifications for the duty imposed upon her. She may, for example, without any violation of obedience, make

known to them any bodily infirmity, or whatever would render her unfit for the office assigned to her: because her superiors are not angels, but human beings, who require to be made acquainted with what of themselves they cannot learn. But, in stating your disqualifications for any charge, you must take care in the first place, not to speak of those which the superior already knows: for these she must be supposed to have already taken into consideration. Secondly, after explaining your difficulties, you must cheerfully acquiesce in the judgment of the superior; and your acquiescence must be manifested externally, as well for her peace and satisfaction, as for the edification of the community. Hence, before they represent to the superior their unfitness for office, religious would do well to figure to themselves that, notwithstanding their supposed difficulties, she insists on the acceptance of the charge entrusted to them. By this means they will be better disposed to receive, without reply, the decision of the superior.

13. It is necessary to remark, in this place, that a discreet attention to the preservation of health, with a view to be better able to serve God, is not a defect, but an act of virtue. But a superfluous solicitude about health is a fault; and, aided by self-love, makes many unnecessary indulgences appear indispensable. St. Bernard says, that some religious are fitter to be the disciples of Hippocrates and Galenus,



than of Jesus Christ. "*Consider*," says the Saint, "*that you are a monk and not a physician*." (Ser. 30, in Cant.) And he continues: "Consult for your own repose." As if he said, seek to promote your own peace by living like the rest of the community, and by avoiding all singular and superfluous indulgence. "Spare the labour of those who serve the community." Spare the labour of the attendant in the refectory, and of the cook, and seek not after delicacies withheld from others. "Spare the burden of the house;" abstain from putting the community to any superfluous expense. St. Basil exhorted religious to accustom themselves as much as possible to the common fare. Oh! how much better is it for a religious to eat and drink like her companions, than to fast, to take the discipline, or wear hair shirts, and afterwards practise singularity in her food. In singularity, has originated the relaxation of many religious orders. Be not afraid that, by using the common food, you will be wanting in the care of your health: for, although it is not lawful directly to shorten life with the intention of accelerating death, still, according to the common opinion of theologians, it is allowable to abstain from some indulgences, (particularly those that are singular,) which might prolong life for some time. Such abstinence is even an act of virtue, when practised with the intention of promoting our own spiritual advancement and the edification of our neighbour. When

the celebrated chapter of Matts was held, St. Francis of Assisium saw that the demons convened a chapter in which they agreed that, to introduce a relaxation of discipline into his order, in which the spirit of fervour then flourished, the most effectual means would be to induce the religious to receive a great number of novices of noble extraction and of delicate health: because, such subjects would be treated with less rigour; thus, by degrees, discipline would be relaxed, and the spirit of fervour banished from the order. This reasoning was most just. Beware, then, lest by immoderate care of your health you put your salvation in peril, or, at least, lose the crown of a saint. Remember that, had the saints, like you, been unnecessarily solicitous about the preservation of health, they should never have become saints.

#### PRAYER.

O my beloved Lord, you are beauty itself, goodness itself, and love itself; how can I love any thing but you? Fool that I have been; in my past life I have offered numberless insults to you. I have violated your law; but I am sorry above all things for my sins, and desire to die of grief for having offended you. O my Jesus, have mercy upon me. I desire to cry out continually, my Jesus, mercy; O my Jesus, mercy. But, if for the past I have despised your love, I now prefer it to all

the goods of the earth. You, O my Jesus, are, and shall be for ever, the only object of all my affections. My love, I leave all things, and desire nothing but you. I now say and desire to repeat every moment of my life, that I desire you alone, O my God, and nothing more. Assist me, O Lord, to be faithful to you. Look not on my sins, but on the love you bore to me, when you were nailed to the cross for my salvation. In the merits of your passion I place all my hopes. I love you, O infinite good! O my supreme good! and ask nothing of you but the grace to love you, to love you intensely, and henceforward to love no other object but you, my treasure and my all! My Jesus, I give you my will: purify its affections. I give you my body: preserve it unsullied. I give you my soul: make it belong entirely to you. Burn with your own consuming fire every affection which is opposed to the pure love of your Divinity. O Mary, my great advocate, I hope first in the merits of your Son, and afterwards in your intercession.

## SECTION IV.

### *On the obedience due to the rules.*

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES has asserted, that "*the predestination of religious is connected with the observance of their rules.*" And St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis used to say, that the observance of rule is the shortest way to eternal life and to sanctity. In a word, the only way by which a religious can become a saint, and be saved, is to observe her rule: for her, there is no other way that leads to salvation. Hence, no matter how great her austerities, how frequent her prayers, and how numerous her other spiritual works, a religious who habitually violates any even the most unimportant rule, will never advance a single step towards perfection. She will labour, but without fruit, verifying in herself the words of the Holy Ghost: "He that rejecteth wisdom and discipline is unhappy; and their fruit is vain, and their labours without fruit, and their works unprofitable." (Wis. iii. 11.) They who despise discipline, that is, their rule, are miserable, and trust in vain in their works; for their labours are without fruit. "We," says St.

Teresa, "do not fulfil certain easy duties prescribed by rule, such as silence which gives no pain ; and still we go in search of works of penance : but afterwards we neglect the former, and omit the latter." Not to advance in perfection, is but a small part of the evils which arise from the infraction of light rules. According to St. Bernard, the worst consequence of such transgressions is, that the habit of them renders very difficult the observance of the most important rules, and even of the vows.

2. Oh ! what a scandal to see certain religious, so well instructed during their noviciate in the observance of rule, and after their profession, despise regular discipline, as if their solemn consecration to Jesus Christ exempted them from all the obligations of religion. A learned author says : "It is better to be a finger united to the body, than to be an eye separated from it." An eye torn from the body is but rottenness ; and an action which wears the appearance of virtue, but which is not conformable to rule, will never please God ; but instead of promoting, will impede the perfection of a religious. For, as St. Augustine says, acts of devotion opposed to rule, are but so many steps out of the way, and so many stumbling blocks to the soul.

3. But you, O blessed sister, have left the world to become a saint, and do you not see, that not to conquer yourself in small things

will not only prevent you from being a saint, but will also expose you to the danger of perdition? "*We had,*" says St. Cesarius, "*abundant strength to relinquish the dearest affections, and we are not strong enough to overcome negligence.*" (Hom. viii.) We had the courage to renounce all attachments to parents, to property, and to the pleasures of the world; and now we are too weak to conquer our tendency to violate rule. Cassian relates, (lib. vii. Instit. c. 19,) that, to a certain monk who had abandoned the dignity of senator, to enter religion, but afterwards did not observe his rule, St. Basil said: "*You have lost the rank of senator, and have not become a monk.*" Unhappy man, what have you done? To become a monk, you have forfeited the honourable station of senator, and have not attained the sanctity of a religious. Tertullian says: "*If you deem the liberty of the world to be true liberty, you have returned to servitude, and have lost the liberty of Christ.*" (De corona. mil.) As if he said; O spouse of Jesus, you have gone forth from the slavery of the world, and have taken possession of the liberty of Christ, by putting off all earthly affections—the unhappy chains which hold so many poor souls in bondage; and will you still esteem the liberty of the world to be true liberty? If you do, you have lost the freedom of the children of God, which Jesus Christ purchased for you.

4. Some religious excuse their negligence by saying, that the rules which they violate are of no importance. To them I answer, in the first place, that no rule of religion can be deemed unimportant, or undeserving of attention. All the rules of religion should be respected, because they are all ordained by Almighty God, and approved by the church as means of attaining the perfection to which every religious, consecrated to God, should continually aspire; and because the neglect of the most trifling rules injures regular discipline, and disturbs the whole community. It is certain that the spirit of fervour flourishes in the convent where attention is paid to the smallest rules: but where they are neglected, there piety begins to decay, and by degrees will disappear altogether. Father Sangiure relates, (*Erario. ec. tom. iv. c. 5, § 1,*) that Father Oviedo, the superior of the college of the Jesuits, in Naples, insisted on the punctual observance of even the smallest rules. He was opposed by Father Bobadiglia, who asserted that it was not right to oblige subjects to observe such trifles. By this opposition the rigour of discipline was relaxed: the event shewed the evil consequences of the neglect of rule. By the habitual violation of order, a contempt for the most important, as well as for the smallest rules, was engendered in some who afterwards abandoned religion. Being informed of the relaxation which had taken

place, St. Ignatius ordained, that the rules should be observed with the utmost exactness, and thus discipline was re-established.

5. Tepid and negligent religious disregard trifles, but the devil sets great value on the smallest violation of rule: he carefully marks all our transactions, to charge us with them one day before the tribunal of Jesus Christ. St. Richard, a religious, having once got his hair cut before the usual time, saw the devil gathering and numbering the hairs that were scattered over the floor. (Apud. Sur. 13 Sept.) In like manner, St. Gertrude saw the enemy collecting all the little tufts of wool which, for want of the perfect spirit of poverty, she had allowed to be wasted, and all the syllables of the office that had been omitted in consequence of its being recited with too much rapidity. Blessed Denis the Carthusian relates, that satan appeared once to a religious with a needle and a silk thread in his hand, which she had used without permission. Thus, the enemy of mankind keeps an account of every word uttered in the place or time of silence, of every look of curiosity, and of every transgression of rule into which religious fall. It is because they are heedless of small faults, that these miserable souls experience nothing but aridity and irksomeness in their prayers, communions, and in all their exercises of devotion. In punishment of one look of curiosity, contrary to an inspiration of the Holy Ghost, not to indulge



her eyes, St. Gertrude was visited with spiritual dryness for eleven days. It is but just that whoever sows little, should gather but little fruit. "*He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly.*" (2 Cor. ix. 6.) How can the Lord be liberal of his graces and consolations to a religious who serves him with reserve and with negligence? Had she faithfully observed such a rule, God would perhaps have bestowed upon her great graces; but, in punishment of her negligence, he has justly withheld them from her. Blessed Egidius used to say: "*By a small neglect a great grace may be lost.*"

6. "*Many,*" says St. Bonaventure, "*desire to die for Christ, and are, at the same time, unwilling to bear light crosses for his sake.*" Many pant after the crown of martyrdom, and will violate rule rather than submit to a trifling inconvenience. If, says the Saint, you received a command hard to be observed, and in its fulfilment, attended with serious disadvantages, there might perhaps be some apology for its violation: but for the infraction of rules of easy observance, there cannot be the shadow of an excuse. The more unimportant a rule, and the more easy it is to be observed, the more imperfect the religious who transgresses it; because, the greater is her attachment to self-will. But God grant, that the disregard of small rules may not lead her one day to the violation of her vows, and to eternal perdition. "*He that breaketh a hedge,*" says

the Holy Ghost, "*a serpent shall bite him.*" (Ecc. x. 8.) Whoever breaks down the fence of the rule, stands in great danger of being one day bitten by the infernal serpent. When you see a religious of exemplary conduct fall into the pit of sin, do not imagine that the devil, by the first attack, succeeded in effecting her ruin. No, he first induced her to neglect her rule and to despise small things, and then drew her into grievous transgressions.

7. Others excuse themselves by saying that the rule does not bind under pain of sin. It has been already said, (chap. vi. n. 3,) that to violate without sufficient necessity, even the rules which are not obligatory under the penalty of moral guilt, is, according to the common opinion of theologians, at least a venial transgression. Speaking of the rule of his order which has not the force of a strict precept, St. Thomas, after stating that the violation of the vows is a mortal sin, says that "*the transgression of the other rules is only a venial fault.*" (2. 2. q. 186. a. 9, ad 1.) I have said that to break any rule without sufficient cause, is *at least a venial sin*. For, when the violation of rule is productive of serious injury or of great scandal in the convent, it may be a mortal sin. For example, to disturb habitually the general silence; to enter the cells of your companions; to break without leave the fasts prescribed by rule; and similar irregularities, sometimes rob the soul of sanc-

tifying grace. But, that the violation of rule is at least a venial sin, cannot be doubted. First, because a religious by transgressing her rule, neglects the means of attaining the perfection to which she is bound to aspire. Secondly, because she is unfaithful to the promise which at her profession she made to observe the rules of the community. Thirdly, because, by her bad example in transgressing rule, she disturbs the good order of the community. Fourthly, and lastly, because every infraction of rule proceeds from self-love, and is a departure from the will of God. Unnecessary transgressions of rule are certainly not acts of virtue: neither can they be said to be indifferent. For how can we call an action indifferent, which is performed through self-will, which gives bad example, and destroys the order of regular discipline? If then the violation of rule cannot be good or indifferent, it must be sinful. Some perhaps will say—it is enough for me that the violation of rule is not a mortal sin. To such persons I would answer, that they are in a very dangerous state. If they are not dead, they are in the last agony. Their unhappy souls are infected with a slow fever which will soon bring on death. Let them read number 3 of the 6th chapter.

8. In extenuation of their neglect of rule, others say that they are advanced in years, and that they cannot bear the rigours practised by young persons. In answer to them I say, that

a religious, whether young or old, does injury to herself and the community, by the transgression of rule. St. Peter Chrysologus says, that, "*by its shade, a barren tree is pernicious not only to itself, but also to the fertile plants by which it is surrounded.*" (Ser. 106.) Yes, every religious who gives bad example by inattention to rule, does an injury to her own soul, and to her fervent companions. Besides, religious advanced in years are more strictly bound to perfection, than those who are young in religion. First, because they have been longer in the cloister: and, as the more time a person has devoted to study, the more extensive should be his learning; so the longer a religious is engaged in the meditation of Jesus crucified, the greater should be her progress in the science of the saints and in Christian perfection. Secondly, because the example of the more advanced is most efficacious in inducing the juniors to observe or to violate rule. Religious of long standing are the torches which illuminate the community: they are the pillars that sustain regular observance; and, by their example, they engage the young in the support of order. But, if discipline be disregarded by the oldest members of the community, the rule will be despised by the novices in religion. Generally speaking, all the irregularities that creep into convents are to be ascribed, not so much to the young, as to the advanced religious who, by their bad example, lead the

others to seek a relaxation of the rigour of the rule. As long as their works contradict their words, all their exhortations and entreaties to the juniors to observe rule, will be unprofitable. "*The eyes,*" says St. Ambrose, "*persuade sooner than the ears.*" (Ser. 76.) Example is far more persuasive than admonition.

9. And how is it possible to induce novices to observe rule, when the conduct of superiors is subversive of regular observance? "*No-thing,*" says St. Tertullian, "*can be built up by the same means as that by which it is pulled down.*" (Præsc.) When Eleazar was tempted by the wicked Antiochus to transgress the divine command, which forbade the Hebrews to eat swine's flesh, his friends, through compassion of his old age, besought him to escape death by pretending to comply with the tyrant's order. But the venerable old man wisely replied, "*that he would rather be sent into the other world: for it doth not become our age to dissemble.*" (2 Mac. vi. 23.) He would rather sacrifice his life than pretend, at such an advanced age, to break the divine precept, and thus teach his young countrymen to transgress the law. "*The look of a just man,*" says St. Ambrose, "*is an admonition.*" (Ser. 10, in Psal. 118.) Oh! what an affecting admonition to novices, and how far superior to the most eloquent exhortation, to see an aged religious observing with punctuality all the rules great and small! All the zeal and

exertions of religious who love perfection, should be directed to the support of discipline in all its rigour. When Jesus Christ by stretching forth his right hand shewed St. Teresa that he was espoused to her, he said : "*Henceforth, as my true spouse, you shall be zealous for my honour.*" Every spouse, then, of Jesus should ardently seek his glory. But, it is for the observance of the rules which are the principal support of perfection in the community, that religious should display all their zeal. And this zeal should be cherished not only by superiors, but by all, and especially by those whose situation or age gives them authority over the other sisters. Whenever St. Andrew Avellino saw the rules transgressed, he admonished with great fervour, not only his companions in religion, but also his superiors. It is related in the life of Father Torres, (lib. vi. c. 1, § 7,) that one of his penitents, Sister M. Teresa Spinelli, a religious of great zeal and piety in the convent of the most holy Trinity at Naples, seeing certain abuses introduced into the community, opposed them vehemently without regard to any person, however great his dignity. She had in view only God's honour; and to uphold it, by resisting the introduction of irregularity into religion, she endured many troubles and contradictions. When manifest disorders steal into a convent, it is not pride or temerity, but an act of virtue, to exclaim against them, and even to oppose

the superiors themselves, should such opposition be necessary for the correction of abuses.

10. Through a pretended fear of being troublesome to the superior, some abstain from asking permission to do what they are forbidden by rule to do without her leave. This, too, is a vain excuse : for superiors, instead of being annoyed, are edified by the religious who asks permissions as often as they may be required. Besides, how can a superior complain of the sisters for asking leave to do what their rule forbids them to do without her permission? Be careful, then, never to abstain from asking any permission which your rule commands you to ask. And when, to support the observance of rule, your superior refuses your request, be not disturbed, but thank her for the refusal, and keep your soul in peace. All the passengers in a ship rejoice, and even feel grateful to the pilot, when they see that he compels all the sailors without exception to attend to their duty : for, should even one of them neglect his post, the vessel might be lost. The rules are burdensome ; but, they are only the burden of the wings with which we fly to the Lord. "*The burden of Christ,*" says St. Augustine, "*has wings.*" (In Ps. 59.) Yes, it has wings which assist us to rise on high. The rules are fetters ; but they are bonds of love which unite us to the Supreme Good. When bound by rule, we should say with holy David : "*The lines are fallen into*

*me in goodly places."* (Ps. xv. 6.) To me these cords are not a badge of dishonour, but of nobility; they are the object of my love, because they deliver me from the chains of hell. And when we feel pain or sorrow, in consequence of being deprived by our rule of any gratification which self-love prompts us to desire, let us rejoice and say with the Apostle: "*I a prisoner in the Lord.*" (Eph. iv. 1.) I see that I am a prisoner, but I exult in those chains which bind me to my God, and merit for me an eternal crown. "*He would not,*" says St. Augustine, "*put a golden necklace on you, if he had not first chained you in iron fetters.*" (In Ps. 149.) The Lord would not give you the golden necklace of eternal glory, without having first bound you with the chains of rule.

11. When then a sister asks you to do what without permission you are forbidden to do, tell her without hesitation that you cannot accede to her request. You ought not to be ashamed to refuse when there is question of avoiding a fault, and especially the violation of rule. No, should the others be negligent, it is your duty to be singular in regular observance. Be not afraid that your regularity will be an occasion of vain glory. That your example may shine forth, and serve as an incentive to others to observe rule and thus give glory to God, it is certainly his will that, if the rest of the community be careless, you



should be singular in attending even to the smallest rules. "*So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Mat. v. 16.) If you are not able to do great things for God, to perform rigorous penances, or to devote much time to prayer, strive at least to observe your rule with exactness; and be assured that, by its sole observance, you shall in a short time make rapid progress in perfection. A great servant of God used to say, that the punctual observance of rule is the short way to sanctity. "*The best perfection,*" says St. Bonaventure, "*is to fulfil all things whatsoever that are prescribed.*" (Spec. Par. ii. c. 2.) God will be liberal to a religious in proportion to her fidelity to him. "A religious," says St. Teresa, "faithful to the minutest of the rules, does not walk, but flies to perfection without either wings or feathers."

12. St. Augustine justly calls the rule the mirror of religious: for, by its observance, the character of a religious may be known. Yes, says Hugo of Victor, commenting on St. Augustine, the rule is the best test by which we may discover "whether religious are just or unjust; whether they advance; whether they are pleasing or displeasing to God." By seeing religious attentive to rule, or careless about its observance, we ascertain at once whether they love or do not love perfection; whether they go forward or recede; whether they please

or displease God. Be assured that a religious will become a saint, not by doing a multiplicity of works, but by the faithful observance of rule. At the times set apart by the rule for labour, or for recreation, a religious should not go to prayer, to the choir, nor take the discipline. These unseasonable devotions are, says Father Alvarez, sacrifices of rapine which God does not accept. A certain Capuchin was accustomed to absent himself from the common labours, for the purpose of attending to his private devotions. On the bed of sickness Jesus Christ, in quality of his judge, appeared to him, and ordered all *his* vocal prayers, and other devotions performed during the time of the common exercises, to be taken from *him*, and to be distributed among those who had laboured for the community. By the mercy of God his life was prolonged ; his health was restored ; and ever after, the good brother assisted most punctually at all the common duties. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis used to say, that the best means to acquire great merit, is to be present at every assembly of the community. It is true that, in certain circumstances, as when you labour under infirmity, or are engaged in some very important duty of office, it is not a fault to break some small rule. But it is likewise true, that transgressions committed under pretence of sickness or necessity, frequently proceed from sloth, and from a want of affection for the rule.

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For, others who are perhaps more infirm, and not less occupied in the offices of the convent, never violate the rules which you so often transgress. They who love discipline, find the means of observing rule, and also of discharging the duties of office. St. Teresa used to say, that *"sometimes the evil is small, and therefore we imagine that we are not bound to avoid it."*

13. To read your rule frequently for the purpose of seeing what faults you commit, and what you have to correct, will contribute greatly to infuse into your soul an affection for exact observance. The reading of the rules is one of the best spiritual lectures you can make. It will also be very profitable to make your particular examen on the rules which you transgress most frequently. Whenever you violate rule, be not ashamed to acknowledge your fault to the superior, and to ask penance for it. The devil once said to St. Dominick, that, in the chapter at which religious confess their defects, and receive penance and admonition for them, he lost all that he gained in the refectory, in the parlour, and in the other places of the monastery. Before you confess your fault, dispose your heart to accept whatever reproof or penance may be given to you, lest you should be like the religious who, to shew that they are humble and exact in the observance of rule, acknowledge their defects, but are, at the same time, unwilling to be re-

buked for their transgressions. But, to be profitable, the observance of rule, as St. Ignatius has remarked, must, above all, be accompanied with "*the spirit of love, and not the perturbation of fear.*" (Const. par. vi. c. 1.) You should observe the rules, not to escape the rebukes of the superior, nor to win the admiration of the sisters, but through the spirit of love, and to please Jesus Christ. Hence the same saint has declared, that in not annexing the penalty of sin to the violation of the rule of the society of Jesus, his object was "*to make love take the place of the fear of offending God.*" "Count," says St. Eucherius, "*among the days of your life that day only, on which you have denied self-will, and which you have spent without any violation of rule.*" (Hom. ix. ad monac.) St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis has recommended three very efficacious means of observing rule: "*First, to prize the rule as you esteem God himself. Secondly, to act as if you alone were obliged to observe rule. Thirdly, if the others fail in regular observance, to endeavour to supply their deficiency.*"

14. In a word, you must be persuaded that the perfection of a religious does not consist in manifold works, but in performing all her actions well. Great indeed was the praise of the multitude to Jesus Christ, when they said: "*He hath done all things well.*" (Mar. vii. 37.) To achieve what is difficult and

extraordinary, is not given to all: nor can extraordinary works be performed at all times. But ordinary actions—such as the common prayer; the examen of conscience; communion; the hearing of mass; the recitation of the divine office; the fulfilment of the duties annexed to the offices of the community; and the other obligations imposed by rule, are duties which may be discharged every day, and by all the members of the convent. Be assured that, though, in the fulfilment of ordinary duties, you should be employed in the meanest occupations, the faithful discharge of them will certainly make you a saint. It is not enough to do what God wills; it is moreover necessary to do it in the manner he wishes. It is related in the Chronicles of the Cistercians, that St. Bernard saw many angels noting what the monks were doing in the choir. The works of one were written in gold; of another in silver; of a third in ink; and of a fourth in water; to denote the perfection or imperfection with which each attended to prayer. Consider then how easily, if you will, you can arrive at perfection: by the discharge of your ordinary duties, you may become a saint. The Lord does not require of you lofty flights of contemplation, nor formidable penances; all he demands is, that you perform all your actions well.

15. Many religious, on days of devotion; for example, during the novenas of the Na-

tivity, of the Holy Ghost, and of the Blessed Virgin, practise many exercises of piety, fasts, disciplines, vocal prayers, and similar works of penance. All these are very good; but, the best devotion for a religious, on such occasions, is to perform her ordinary duties with extraordinary perfection. The perfection of an action consists first in its being done through the sole motive of pleasing God: for it is not the external act, but the purity of intention, that constitutes perfection. "*All the glory of the king's daughter is within.*" (Ps. xlv. 14.) The perfection of an action consists, secondly, in doing it well; that is, with promptness, attention, and exactness. To perform our actions well, the first means is to preserve, during the discharge of your duties, a lively sense of the presence of God, that thus every act may be worthy of his divine eyes. The second means is, to perform every work as if it were the only duty you had to fulfil. When at prayer, let your sole care be to pray well: when you say the divine office, direct all your attention to the devout recitation of it: when engaged in any employment enjoined by obedience, your sole concern should be to discharge it well. Think of nothing but the duty in which you are occupied. To examine, during the time of prayer, how you will execute a certain command, or how you will direct a certain work; or to reflect on the means of performing any other duty, is a temptation of the enemy. "*When,*"

says Father M. Avila, "*any unseasonable thought enters your mind, say: God does not will that I think at this moment on such a subject; and therefore it is not useful for me to reflect upon it: when he commands me, I shall attend to it.*" The third means is, to perform every action as if it were the last of your life. St. Antony frequently recommended this means to his disciples. "*In every work,*" says St. Bernard, "*let each one say to himself: If I were about to die, would I do this?*" (In Spec. Mon.) Would I do it in this manner? Were this the last mass which I should hear, with what devotion would I assist at it? Were this the last office which I should recite, with what attention would I say it? Were this my last communion, or my last prayer, with what fervour would I perform it? When, says St. Basil, you discharge the duties of the morning, imagine that you shall not live till evening: when night approaches, think that you shall not see the morning. It is related of a certain Dominican, who was accustomed to go to confession every morning before he offered the holy sacrifice of the mass, that, being seized with a serious malady, his superior commanded him to prepare for death by a good confession. The good religious raised his hands to heaven, and exclaimed: blessed be God, I have confessed every day for the last thirty years, as if I were to die suddenly. "*Blessed,*" says the Redeemer, "*is that servant, whom, when his*

*Lord shall come, he shall find so doing."* (Mat. xxiv. 46.) And happy the religious whom, should death come suddenly upon her, Jesus Christ, her judge, shall find performing the duty in which she may be engaged, as if she knew it to be the last of her life.

16. To think, each day only on the labours of the day, is another means which greatly assists weak souls to discharge their duties with fervour. The apprehension of the pains to be endured, in living unto death with so much exactness, and in continually resisting self-love, is one of the causes which make many lose courage in the way of God. The best means of conquering this temptation is, to imagine each morning that you have but one day to live. Whoever figures to himself that only one day of life remains, will certainly perform all the actions of that day with great perfection. This means is very profitable to weak souls: but strong and perfect Christians do not require to conceal from themselves the labours necessary for the attainment of sanctity: they rejoice in suffering, and pant for opportunities of pleasing God. To religious beginning to walk in the way of perfection, it will be very useful to consider that what is in itself difficult and painful, will, by habit, soon become easy and agreeable. "*I will,*" says the Holy Ghost, "*lead thee by the paths of equity; which when thou shalt have entered, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when*



*thou runnest, thou shalt not meet a stumbling block.*" (Prov. iv. 11, 12.) I will, says the Lord, first conduct you into the narrow and rugged paths of virtue; but, you shall soon walk through a broad and pleasing way, and there you shall run without difficulties or obstacles. "*At first,*" says St. Bernard, "*some duty will seem intolerable: if you accustom yourself to it, in process of time it will not appear so difficult: afterwards you shall not feel it; and in the end you will delight in it.*" (Lib. i. de cons.) "Behold," says Ecclesiasticus, "with your eyes how I have laboured a little, and have found much rest to myself." (C. li. v. 35.)

#### PRAYER.

O my God, I am that unhappy soul that has long since merited the curse of the barren fig tree. Since I have produced no fruit, why should I occupy a place in religion: I have deserved to be cut down and cast into the fire. Unhappy me! I have been for so many years in religion, and favoured with so many helps to sanctity, and what fruit have I brought forth? But you do not wish that I despair, or diffide in your mercy. You have said—"Ask, and you shall receive." Since you desire me to demand your graces, the first favour I seek is the pardon of all the displeasure I have given to you. I have repaid your love and your benefits by so many insults: but I re-

pent, my God, with my whole soul. The second grace I ask of you is the gift of your love, that henceforth I may love you, not with tepidity, as in my past life, but with my whole soul, and that I may never more give you the least displeasure, but that I may always do whatever I know to be pleasing to you. The third grace I ask is holy perseverance in your love. I now esteem your love more than all the kingdoms of the earth. You wish me to be entirely your's, and I desire to belong to you without reserve. On the cross and in the blessed sacrament, you have given yourself entirely to me: I offer my whole being to you. I thank you for enabling me by your graces to make this oblation. Since you have inspired, I hope you have accepted it. O my Jesus, I am your's; and I trust you will be mine for all eternity. I desire not that my inclinations, but your holy will may live henceforth in me. And I promise from this day forward, to observe all even the smallest of the rules of religion; because I know that all of them are approved by you. O my love! my love! I will say with St. Catherine of Genoa, no more sins. I beseech you to make me always love you, or to take me out of life. Either love or death, O my God. Mary, my mother, speak to your Son, and obtain for me the grace to love him or to die.

## SECTION V.

### *On the four degrees of perfect obedience.*

1. To be perfect in obedience, a religious must obey with promptness, exactness, cheerfulness, and simplicity. These are the degrees of perfect obedience. The first degree, then, is to obey with promptness, executing immediately and without reply every injunction imposed by obedience. There are some who obey only after many entreaties of the superior, and after many attempts to elude her commands. Religious who are truly obedient, do not act in this manner. "*A Christian, faithful to obedience,*" says St. Bernard, "*knows not delays, but prepares his ears for hearing, his hands and his feet for labour.*" (Ser. de obed.) A religious truly obedient is never slow to obey, but instantly applies her ears to hear every precept, and her hands and feet to execute every command. She does not indulge in slothful slumbers after the morning bell, but, obeying its sound as the call of God himself, she instantly rises. On receiving a precept, she makes no reply, offers no excuses, manifests no repugnance, as some do, by a

silence which often afflicts the superior, but instantly and with external joy shews her readiness to obey, and immediately fulfils the command. She is not like those who are, with difficulty, made to submit to authority, and who, by their reluctance to obey, lose the greater part of the merit of obedience. No, to ensure her compliance with every duty, neither entreaties, nor arguments, nor repeated commands, are necessary. She fulfils at once, and without reply, every obligation of obedience.

2. Oh! how meritorious in the sight of God is prompt obedience. He has frequently shewn, even by supernatural prodigies, how acceptable it is in his sight. St. Mark, a monk, while engaged in writing, was called by his superior, the Abbot Silvan; the saint left unfinished a word which he had just commenced, and instantly obeyed. On his return he found the remainder of the word written in letters of gold. (Vita Patr. de obed. § 1.) Blossius relates, that a nun to whom the infant Jesus appeared, being summoned at the moment of his appearance to a certain duty, instantly obeyed the call. At her return she found him grown up to age of manhood, and was addressed by him in the following words: "*My child, your ready obedience has made me grow thus in your heart.*" Jesus appeared to another religious who, on hearing the bell for vespers, left him and went to the choir. When

she returned to her cell, he said to her: "*Because you left me, you have found me again: had you not obeyed the call of duty, I should have departed from you.*" (Chron. S. Fran. c. 30.) To try the obedience of some of his monks who were confined to bed by sickness, St. Columban commanded them to rise, and go to the barn to thresh corn. As many as were filled with the true spirit of obedience instantly arose, and were suddenly restored to health. The others, because they were weak in spirit, as well as in body, remained in bed, and continued in their infirmities. (P. Plat. de bono. Stat. rel. l. ii. c. 5.) God has also sometimes shewn how much he dislikes tardy obedience. Blessed Juniper, while employed in planting a tree in the garden, was called by St. Francis. The brother did not obey the call immediately, but waited till he had finished the work in which he was engaged. The Saint, to shew him the fault he had committed by the tardiness of his obedience, cursed the tree, and, on the part of God, commanded it to grow no larger. The tree obeyed, and never increased in size. (Wadding. Annal. Min. an. 1222, n. 11.) The narrator of this fact states, that when he wrote his annals, the tree was preserved in the convent of the city of Carniola; that it remained green, but was as small as when it was planted. How scandalous is it to see certain religious slow to obey, for no other reason, than because they are commanded to

obey? Were the duty of obedience not of precept, they should perhaps discharge it without delay, because it would be agreeable to self-will. Some will obey only after having frequently said to the superior: "*I cannot perform this duty.*" They would speak with more truth, if they said: "*I do not wish to do what you command.*" St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say, that *he who, instead of saying "I will not," says "I cannot," deceives himself, and not the superior.*

3. The second degree of obedience is to obey with exactness; that is, with punctuality, and without interpretation. You should obey with punctuality, and not rob God of any part of your sacrifice, by a mutilation of the victim you offer to him. You should carefully fulfil the whole duty imposed upon you, and employ, in its discharge, all the time prescribed by obedience. Some are punctual in the presence of the superior; but in her absence, they comply so imperfectly with the obligations of obedience, that it would be difficult to determine whether the fulfilment of their duties is a source of merit or demerit. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis used to say, that "*religious have consecrated their will, not to men, but to God; that they have given it to him, not in part, but entirely and without reserve.*" It is also necessary to obey without interpreting, in your own favour, the commands which you receive. A lay brother, from another convent,

came one day to the house of the Dominicans in Bologna: being obliged to go out in haste on pressing and important business, he obtained permission from the superior to take for his companion the brother he should first meet. Meeting by chance St. Thomas, he asked the saint, in the name of the superior, to accompany him. The saint instantly obeyed, but being corpulent, walked slowly: the lay brother, because his business was urgent, entreated the saint to quicken his pace. When the brother knew who his companion was, he frequently begged pardon of St. Thomas for having treated him so disrespectfully; but the holy Doctor bore all without the least sign of impatience. (Ap. Sur. 7. Mart.) St. Thomas might have interpreted the command of the Prior, and have reasonably inferred that it did not extend to him. But no: he wished to obey without reply and without interpretation: and when he was told that he might have excused himself, he answered, that the sole concern of a religious should be, to fulfil with exactness the obligations of obedience.

4. Cassian relates, (Inst. lib. v. c. 40,) that two young religious being sent by the Abbot John, with a basket of figs, as a present to an aged monk who lived at a distance, missed their way, and wandered through a desert for many days without food. In such necessity they might, without violating obedience, have interpreted in their own favour, the command

of their superior, and have eaten of the figs sent to the monk. But, rather than depart from even the letter of the precept, they submitted to a painful death : they were afterwards found dead, and the figs untouched. I do not mean to say that it is never lawful to transgress the letter of a precept ; or, that it is wrong to interpret the will of superiors when circumstances justify or render necessary an interpretation of their command. But, I assert, that certain forced and sophistical interpretations differ but little from formal disobedience. Subjects should always comply with even the letter of a precept, unless they be certain that the superior does not intend to oblige them to fulfil it. Some religious, though fully acquainted with the will of the superior, follow the dictates of their own caprice, saying, that what they do is not forbidden. But Albertus Magnus says, that “ *a truly obedient man never waits for a command, but performs, as if commanded, whatever he knows or judges to be the will of his superior.*” (De Virtu. c. 2.) It is in the prompt fulfilment of the will of the superior, that perfect obedience consists. St. Thomas teaches, that the will of the superior, in whatever way it is known, should be regarded as a tacit precept by the religious who aspires to perfect obedience. (1. q. 164. a. 2.)

5. The third degree of obedience is to obey with joy. To obey with reluctance and murmurings against superiors, is a defect rather



than an act of virt  . “If,” says St. Bernard, “*murmuring in your heart, you begin to judge the superior, though you externally comply with the precept, your compliance is not a virtue, but a covering of malice.*” (Ser. 3, de circum.) If you murmur interiorly against the superior, the fulfilment of her commands is but a cloak thrown over your malice. For, your obedience is only external; and in your heart you despise her authority and violate the divine law. Oh! how deplorable is the state of certain religious who discharge with cheerfulness, only the duties which they themselves have asked, or which they have been requested and entreated to perform; and who accept without reluctance only the offices by which their own self-love is gratified.

6. How can a person who importunes the superiors for a charge agreeable to her inclinations, who is willing to accept such a charge, and no other; how, I say, can she be called an obedient religious? St. Ignatius used to say, that to regard, as an act of obedience, the fulfilment of a command extorted from a superior, is a great illusion; and, in confirmation of his assertion, he adduced the following words of St. Bernard: “*Whosoever, either openly or secretly, labours to obtain from his spiritual father a precept agreeable to self-will, deceives and vainly flatters himself, by imagining that he practises obedience: for, in this, he does not obey his superior; but the superior*

rather obeys him." Tritemius goes so far as to assert, that religious who obey with reluctance, are *monsters of the devil*: for, he too obeys, but his obedience is forced. A religious who obeys only by constraint, is, in a certain sense, worse than the demons; because she has promised obedience to God by her solemn vow, but they have not. In what, I ask, does the obedience of such a religious consist? Is it not in doing with cheerfulness what pleases her own caprice, and in performing what is painful to self-love with reluctance, and with external signs of discontent? "*What room is there for obedience,*" says St. Bernard, "*where the bitterness of sadness is perceived?*" (De vir. obed.)

7. "God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. ix. 7.) The Lord loves the man who performs with cheerfulness, whatever he does for the love of God. Religious, filled with the true spirit of obedience, execute with the greatest joy the commands that are most opposed to their inclinations: because, it is in the fulfilment of such commands that they are most certain of not doing their own will, and of doing the will of God. And what can give greater happiness to a Christian than, in the performance of every duty, to be able to say; *by this action I please God?* If you, O blessed sister, desire to give greater glory to Jesus Christ, beg of the superior to impose upon you whatever precepts she pleases, without any re-

gard to your inclinations : for, thus she will be more free in prescribing to you the necessary duties, and you shall have greater merit in executing her orders. You shall then be certain of deserving as great a reward by works agreeable to self-love, as by the exercises opposed to the feelings of flesh and blood. Never depart from the excellent rule of St. Francis de Sales—“*neither to ask, nor to refuse any duty.*”

8. “*Obedience,*” says St. John Climacus, “*is the sepulchre of self-will.*” (Grad. 4.) Some call obedience *the death* of self-will ; but it is more properly denominated *its sepulchre*. For, the dead, as long as they are unburied, may be seen ; but after their interment, they are no longer visible. Some destroy self-will by the practice of obedience, but still allow it to appear in their exterior. In the perfect, self-will is not only dead, but buried, so that in their actions it can never be perceived. In St. Mary Magdelene de Pazzis, self-will was so completely extinguished, that her superiors could never know what was agreeable or disagreeable to her. Endeavour to imitate her conduct, and to receive with perfect indifference all the duties, offices, and employments that may be assigned to you ; and to fulfil them with cheerfulness and alacrity. If you desire to discharge your obligations with true joy, you must perform them from the pure intention of pleasing God. If you comply with them,

to obtain the friendship of the superior; to induce her to grant your requests; to escape her displeasure, or the charge of disobedience; or through any other motive of self-interest, you may indeed satisfy the superior; but you will not please God: and therefore you shall suffer all the fatigue and pains of obedience, without enjoying the tranquillity of an obedient religious. Moreover, if to please God be the sole end of your obedience, you will cheerfully obey, not only when the tone and manner of the superior are sweet and agreeable, but also, when her directions are given in severe and commanding language: and thus you shall lay up great treasures of merit. Father Rodriguez relates, that St. Gertrude besought the Lord to deliver the abbess from her roughness of manner, and impatience towards the sisters. But, in answer, Almighty God told her that he permitted these defects in the abbess for her own humiliation, and for the greater trial and merit of the religious.

9. The fourth and last degree of perfect obedience is to obey with simplicity. "*Servants,*" says the Apostle, "*be obedient \* \* \* in the simplicity of your hearts.*" (Eph. vi. 5.) To be simple of heart, you must subject your judgment to that of the superior, and esteem as just and reasonable whatever she commands. Behold how the Holy Ghost teaches his spouse the duty of perfect obedience: "*If thou knowest not thyself, O fairest among*

women, go forth, and follow after the steps of thy flocks." (Can. i. 7.) O fairest of women, if you know not how to make yourself the object of my love, come and I will teach you: go forth from thyself, and follow after the steps of thy flocks, which, when sent to pasture, ask not where, or when, or why they go? They obey their pastor without reply: so should a religious obey without demanding the reasons of her obedience. That great servant of God, Father Pavone, of the society of Jesus, used to say that obedience, to be perfect, should captivate the intellect as well as the will. The obedience of a religious whose will only obeys, and whose understanding condemns what the superior commands, is lame and imperfect. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis says, that "perfect obedience requires a soul without a will, and a will without an intellect." Hence, to acquire the perfect spirit of obedience, the saint was accustomed, first to captivate her judgment, and then to perform the duty imposed upon her. He who does not practise obedience of the intellect, will never obey with cheerfulness; his submission will be that of a slave—the result of force, not the obedience of a child, and the fruit of love. Hence the Apostle says: "*With a good will serving, as to the Lord, and not to men.*" (Ep. vi. 7.) Obey with a good will, serving God rather than men. Your obedience shall never be cheerful, unless it proceed from a motive of

pleasing God, who can never err in his precepts, and who commands only what will be profitable to us.

10. St. Thomas (1. 2. qu. 83, a. 5, ad 3,) teaches that, though the commands of a superior may appear impossible, a religious should make an effort to fulfil them. Because subjects have no right to decide on the possibility or impossibility of a precept imposed upon them. "*Perfect obedience*," says St. Bernard, "*is indiscreet*." (De Vit. Sol.) In subjects, perfect obedience does not require discretion. And, in another place, the Saint says: "It is impossible for a prudent novice to persevere in religion." A novice who regulates her obedience by her own prudence, cannot persevere in the religious state. Because, continues the Saint, to assume the office of superior, is, in a novice, insufferable pride. "*To discern belongs to the superior; and to obey is the duty of the subject*." To decide what is to be done, is the prerogative of the superior; and to fulfil her commands the bounden duty of subjects. St. Ignatius once said, that should the Pope command him to undertake a voyage by sea, in a ship without a mast, without oars, or sails, he would blindly obey the precept. And, when he was told that it would be imprudent to expose his life to such danger, he answered, that prudence is necessary in superiors; but in subjects, the perfection of prudence is to obey without prudence.

11. This doctrine is conformable to sacred scripture: "*Behold,*" says the Lord, "*as clay is in the potter's hands, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel!*" (Jer. xviii. 6.) . Religious must leave themselves in the hands of the superior, to be moulded as she wills. "Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it: *what art thou making?*" (Is. xlv. 9.) If clay should dare to ask the potter, why hast thou formed me thus?—the potter ought to answer: be silent, it is not your business to inquire what I do, but to obey and to receive whatever form I please to give you. Such the answer merited by religious who seek to know why a precept, an office, or a duty, is imposed upon them. St. Jerome, in an epistle to Rusticus, a monk, says: "*It is your duty to obey: judge not of the decision of your superiors.*" In the lives of the monks of La Trappe, we read, that a good religious called Arsenius, judged to be superfluous the expense incurred by the superior in making the church more commodious. But afterwards reflecting that his judgment was in opposition to that of his superior, he went immediately and with tears accused himself of his fault. The abbot told him that his fault was not so grievous as he imagined: but Arsenius could not restrain the torrent of tears which flowed from his eyes.

12. To regard as good whatever superiors command, is the blind obedience so much praised by the saints; and is the duty of every

religious. First, because, according to the proverb, *no one is fit to be a judge in his own cause*. When there is question of their own interest, self-love renders it difficult for all men to distinguish truth from falsehood: and therefore no one should be the judge of what regards himself. Secondly, because a superior is acquainted with a great many circumstances of which subjects are ignorant; and therefore her opinion should be preferred to theirs. Thirdly, because subjects only regard their own interests; but the superior looks to the good of the community. Fourthly, because superiors are assisted, in a particular manner, by Almighty God to govern the community; and therefore are favoured with lights not given to subjects.

13. Of St. Paul it is written, that after his conversion, "*when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. But they leading him by the hand, brought him to Damascus.*" (Acts, ix. 8.) Some religious are unwilling to obey, without examining whether the duty imposed upon them will be profitable or unprofitable to them. Should it appear not to be advantageous to them, they either refuse to obey, or obey only with reluctance, and are sometimes daring enough to charge the superior with imprudence, indiscretion, or partiality. All this arises from the want of the spirit of blind obedience, and from a desire to demand from the superior the reason why she imposes cer-



tain duties. "*To seek for reasons, is,*" according to St. Bernard, "*a sign of an imperfect heart.*" (De Discip. & Præc.) Whoever demands the reason of a precept, shews a very imperfect will. It was by asking the reasons of the divine command, that the devil tempted Eve to eat the forbidden apple, and succeeded in making her prevaricate. "*Why,*" said the serpent, "*hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree in paradise.*" (Gen. iii. 1.) Had Eve answered: it belongs not to us to seek the reason of the precept; it is our duty to obey; she should not have fallen. But she replied, we can eat of the trees of paradise. There is but one tree which we are forbidden to touch, "*lest perhaps we die.*" Perceiving that she began to doubt the threatened punishment of death, he rejoined: be not afraid, *you shall not die*; and thus he persuaded her to transgress the command of God.

14. Religious who are truly obedient, seek not for reasons; but, like St. Paul, with open eyes, they see not, and reduce a haughty intellect to the subjection of obedience, by submitting their judgment to that of their superior. St. John Climacus says, that a religious should banish thoughts opposed to obedience with the same promptness, as she would reject thoughts against chastity: and that, instead of questioning the reasonableness of the precepts of her superior, she should always seek

for reasons to defend their expediency. Almighty God has frequently shewn, in a miraculous manner, how much he delights in the blind obedience of religious. Sulpitius Severus relates, (*Dial. de Vita S. Mart. cap. 12,*) that to try the obedience of a young man who applied for admission into a certain monastery, the abbot commanded him to walk into a furnace filled with burning coals. The young man instantly plunged into the fire, but received no injury: his clothes were not even touched. St. Gregory relates, (*Dial. lib. ii. c. 7,*) that St. Benedict commanded St. Maur to follow the young St. Placidus who had fallen into a river. St. Maur obeyed, walked on the waters, and saved the life of the boy. These examples are not to be imitated. The precepts given by these holy men, and their fulfilment, proceeded from extraordinary impulses of the Holy Ghost who assured the superiors, that, by their commands, and the subjects, that, by their obedience, they were accomplishing the divine will. But, at the same time, they show how much God is pleased by blind unhesitating obedience. To try the obedience of their subjects, superiors sometimes impose commands that are inexpedient, and even absurd. St. Francis commanded his disciples to plant cabbages with their roots uppermost. He obliged brother Matthew to continue turning around till he fell to the ground. St. Teresa made similar trials of her children. But you will ask, of

what use are such precepts? In answer, .I ask, why are untrained horses made sometimes to run, sometimes to stop, and sometimes to go back? All these contribute to make them obedient to the bridle: and, to exercise religious in what appears extravagant and useless, accustoms them to subdue the stubbornness of their own will, and to subject their own judgments to that of their superiors.

15. St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say, that "*to follow one's own judgment in the practice of obedience, is not obedience.*" In every act of your life, beware, O blessed sister, never to prefer your own opinion to that of your superiors. St. Philip Neri has remarked, that nothing is more dangerous than to be directed by one's own counsel. Peter Blesensis says, that "*to trust one's self alone, is the greatest of evils.*" Cassian asserts, that "*it is impossible for him who confides in his own judgment, to escape the deceits and illusions of the devil.*" (Coll. xvi. 11.) Hence St. John Chrysostom teaches, that "*nothing is so destructive of the church, as a separation of disciples from their masters.*" (Hom. in dict. S. Paul.) There is nothing which does greater injury to the church of God, than the opposition of disciples to the opinion of their masters; and there is nothing more ruinous to a religious community, than the disregard of the sisters for the judgment and commands of their superiors.

## PRAYER.

O my Jesus, you never abandon a soul that seeks you. "*Thou hast not forsaken them that love thee.*" (Dan. xiv. 37.) I have left the world to find you in this holy place: but I have only sought myself and my own pleasures, and thus I have greatly offended you. Forget, O Lord, the past, and pardon the offences which I have committed against you, and which I now abhor with my whole soul. I feel a strong desire to become a saint, and to please you in all things. I know that this desire is your gift. Ah, my Spouse, what has induced you to visit with so much love a soul so ungrateful, and to bestow upon me so many graces, after all the insults I have offered to you? With an humble and contrite heart, I thank you for all your favours: be a thousand times blessed for them. You invite me to your love; and I desire to obey your call. I know the value of this grace, and am resolved never more to be unmindful of your benefits, as I have hitherto been. I love you, O my Sovereign good! I love you, O my God! You are my only treasure, and the only object of my love. Give me strength to correspond, by my affections, to the love which you bear to me. Grant that I may love you always; that I may love you intensely: I ask nothing more. O my mother Mary, thank your Son for me, and obtain for me the grace to be faithful to him during the remainder of my life. O mother of God, in you I trust.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *On the external mortification of the senses.*

THE poor children of Adam must, till death, live in continual warfare: "*For,*" says the Apostle, "*the flesh lusteth against the spirit.*" (Gal. v. 17.) The flesh desires what the spirit dislikes; and the spirit pants for what the flesh abhors. Now, since it is peculiar to irrational creatures to place all their happiness in sensual enjoyment, and to the angels to seek only the accomplishment of God's will, surely if we attend to the observance of the divine commands, we shall, as a learned author justly says, be transformed into angels: but, if we fix our affections on the gratifications of sense, we shall sink to the level of the brute creation. If the soul do not subdue the body, the flesh will conquer the spirit. To maintain his seat on a furious steed, and to escape danger, the horseman must hold a tight rein; and to avoid the corruption of the flesh, we must keep the body in perpetual restraint. We must treat it as a physician treats a patient, to whom he prescribes nauseous medicine, and to whom he refuses palatable food. Cruel indeed

must be the physician who gives to a sick man noxious draughts, because they are pleasing to the taste, and who does not administer useful remedies, because they are bitter and disgusting. And great is the cruelty of the sensual, when, to escape some trifling corporal pain in this life, they expose their souls and bodies to eternal torments in the next. "*Such charity,*" says St. Bernard, "*is destructive of charity: such mercy is full of cruelty; because it serves the body so as to destroy the soul.*" (Apol. ad Guiliel.) The false love of the flesh destroys the true charity which we owe to ourselves: inordinate compassion towards the body is full of cruelty, because, by indulging the flesh, it kills the soul. Speaking of sensualists who deride the mortifications of the saints, the same Father says: "*If we are cruel in crucifying the flesh, you, by sparing it, are far more cruel.*" (Ser. 10, in Ps. Qui hab.) Yes, for, by the pleasures of the body in this life, you shall merit for soul and body inexpressible torments for ever in the next. A solitary who had emaciated his body by very rigorous austerities, being asked why he treated his body so badly, replied: "*I only chastise what chastises me.*" I torment the enemy who persecutes my soul, and who seeks my destruction. The Abbot Moses being once censured for his severity toward his body, replied: "*Let the passions cease, and I will also cease to mortify my flesh.*" When the flesh ceases

to molest me, I shall cease to crucify its appetites.

2. If, then, we wish to be saved, and to please God, we must take pleasure in what the flesh refuses, and must reject what the flesh demands. Our Lord once said to St. Francis of Assisium: "*If you desire my love, use bitters as sweets, and sweets as bitters.*" Some will say that perfection does not consist in mortification of the body, but in the abnegation of the will. To them I answer with Father Pinamonti, that the fruit of the vineyard does not consist in the surrounding hedge; but still, if the hedge be taken away, you will seek in vain for the produce of the vine. "*Where there is no hedge,*" says the Holy Ghost, "*the possession shall be spoiled.*" (Ec. xxxvi. 27.) So ardent was the desire of St. Lewis Gonzaga to crucify his flesh, that, although weak in health, he sought nothing but mortifications and penitential rigours: and, to a person who once said that sanctity does not consist in corporal works of penance, but in the denial of self-will, he answered in the words of the Redeemer: "*These things you ought to have done, and not to leave those undone.*" (Mat. xxiii. 23.) He meant to say that, to keep the flesh in subjection to reason, the mortification of the body is necessary, as well as the denial of the will. "*I chastise my body,*" says St. Paul, "*and bring it into subjection.*" (1 Cor. ix. 27.) The flesh, when

indulged, will be brought with difficulty to obey the divine law. Hence, St. John of the cross, speaking of certain spiritual directors who despise and discourage external penance, says, that *"he who inculcates loose doctrine regarding the mortification of the flesh, should not be believed, though he confirmed his preaching by miracles."*

3. The world and the devil are very powerful enemies; but our own body, because it is a domestic enemy, is a still more dangerous antagonist. "*A domestic enemy,*" says St. Bernard, "*is the worst of foes.*" (De anima. c. 15.) A town that is besieged has more to apprehend from the enemies that are within, than from those that are without the walls; because it is far more difficult to ward off the attacks of the former, than those of the latter. St. Joseph Calasanctius used to say, that "*we should pay no more attention to the body than to the vilest rag.*" Such indeed has been the practice of the saints. As the indulgence of the body by sensual pleasures is the sole and constant study of worldlings, so the continual mortification of the flesh is to the saints the only object of their care and of their desires. St. Peter of Alcantara, was accustomed to say to his body: O my body, keep your peace; I shall give you no rest here below; pains and torments shall be your portion in this life; when we shall be in paradise, you will then enjoy that repose which shall never end. Simi-



lar was the practice of St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, who, on the bed of death, stated that she did not remember to have ever taken pleasure in any other object than in God alone. If we read the lives of the saints, and see the works of penance which they performed, we shall be ashamed of the delicacy and of the reserve with which we chastise the flesh. In the lives of the ancient fathers, (lib. i. in Vit. S. Euphros.) we read of a large community of nuns who never tasted fruit or wine. Some of them took food only once in two days; others never eat a meal, except after two or three days of rigorous abstinence: all were clothed, and even slept in haircloth. I do not require such austerities from religious of the present day: but is it too much for them to take the discipline several times in the week?—to wear a chain round the body till the hour of dinner?—not to approach the fire on some day in each week, and during novenas of devotion?—to abstain from fruit and sweetmeats?—and, in honour of the mother of God, to fast every saturday on bread and water, or at least to be content with one dish?

4. But you will say: I am weak, and my director forbids me to practise any corporal austerity. Obey your confessor, but take care to embrace with peace all the troubles of your infirmities, and all the inconveniencies arising from the heat or cold of the seasons. If you cannot chastise your body by positive

rigours, abstain, at least, from some lawful pleasures. St. Francis Borgia, when amusing himself in hawk-hunting, used to cast down his eyes when he saw the hawk about to spring upon its prey. St. Lewis Gonzaga always turned away his eyes from the objects of curiosity exhibited at the festivities at which he might be present. Why cannot you practise similar mortifications? If denied lawful pleasures, the body will not dare to seek forbidden indulgence: but, if continually gratified by every innocent enjoyment, it will soon draw the soul into sinful gratification. Besides, that great servant of God, Father Vincent Carafa, of the society of Jesus, used to say, that the Almighty has given us the goods of the earth, not only that we may enjoy them, but also that we may have the means of pleasing him by offering to him his own gifts, and by voluntarily renouncing them for his sake. It is true, indeed, that certain innocent pleasures assist our weakness and prepare us for spiritual exercises; but it is likewise true, that sensual pleasures poison the soul by attaching her to creatures. Hence, like poison, they must be used sparingly. Poisons, when properly prepared and taken with moderation, are sometimes conducive to health: and sensual delights, because they are poisonous remedies, must be taken with great caution and reserve, without attachment to them, only through necessity, and to be better able to serve God.

5. Besides, for the recovery of bodily health, you must take care never to impair the strength of the soul, which will be always weak as long as the flesh is not mortified. "*I compassionate,*" says St. Bernard, "*the infirmities of the body: but the infirmity of the soul should be an object of greater alarm.*" (Eph. 321.) I pity the infirmities of the body, but feel greater commiseration for the more dangerous maladies of the soul. Oh! how often is bodily weakness made the pretext for unnecessary indulgence. "*We leave the choir,*" says St. Teresa, "*today, because the head aches; on tomorrow, because it had ached; and on the day after, lest it should ache.*" (Cam. di Per. c. 10.) Hence, in the next chapter, she thus addresses her dear children: "*You have entered religion, not to indulge the flesh, but to die for Jesus Christ. If we do not resolve to disregard the want of health, we shall do nothing. What injury will death do to us? How often have our bodies molested us? Shall not we torment them in return?*" St. Joseph Calas Sanctus says: "*Wo to the religious who loves health more than sanctity.*" St. Bernard considered it indecent in a religious to take strong medicine: for them, he said, decoctions of herbs should be sufficient. I do not require this of you; but I say, that small indeed must be the spiritual progress of the religious who is continually seeking physicians and remedies; who is sometimes not content with the prescription

of the ordinary physician; and who, by her discontent, disturbs the whole community. "*Men,*" says Salvian, "*devoted to Christ, are weak, and wish to be so: if they were robust, they could with difficulty be saints.*" All, and particularly religious, who consecrate themselves to the love of Jesus Christ, are weak in body, and desire to continue in their infirmities: were they strong and vigorous, it would be difficult for them to attain sanctity. The truth of this observation appears from the lives of St. Teresa, St. Rose, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, and other saints. The venerable Beatrix of the Incarnation, the first spiritual daughter of St. Teresa, though afflicted with pains and infirmities, was accustomed to say, that she would not exchange her condition for that of the happiest princess on earth. Such was her patience, that, in the greatest sufferings, she never uttered a word of complaint. Hence a sister once said to her: "*You are like one of those wretched paupers who languish for want of food, but continue to endure the pains of hunger rather than submit to the shame of manifesting their poverty.*" If bodily weakness renders us unable to practise corporal austerities, let us at least learn from her example, to embrace with joy the infirmities with which Almighty God visits us. If borne with patience, they will conduct us to perfection better than voluntary works of penance. St. Sinclética used to say, that "*as corporal*

*maladies are cured by medicine, so the diseases of the soul are healed by the infirmities of the body.*" (In Vit. Pat. l. iii. c. 36.)

6. Oh! how profitable to the spirit are the mortifications of the flesh. They detach the heart from sensual pleasures which wound the soul, and frequently deprive her of life. "*The wounds of charity,*" says Origen, "*make us insensible to the wounds of the flesh.*" (In Cant. c. 3.) Moreover, by mortifications we atone, in this life, for the pains due to our sins. He that has offended God, though the offence may be pardoned, must, either by expiatory works in this life, or by the pains of purgatory in the next, make satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to sin after the remission of its guilt. His sufferings in purgatory will be infinitely greater than any torments which he could endure on earth. "*They shall be in very great tribulation, unless they do penance from their deeds.*" (Apoc. ii. 22.) They who will not have expiated their sins, shall suffer the sharpest torments in the other world. St. Antony relates, that an angel proposed to a sick man, the choice of being confined in purgatory for three days, or of being condemned to a continuation of his infirmities for two years. The sick man chose the three days in purgatory; but scarcely had an hour elapsed in that place of torments, when he began to complain of the angel for having condemned him to a purgation not of three days, but of

many years. What, replied the angel, your body is still warm, and you speak of having spent years in purgatory. If, blessed sister, you wish to suffer in peace, imagine that you have still to live fifteen or twenty years, and say: this is my purgatory: it is the spirit rather than the body that I must conquer.

7. Mortifications raise the soul to God. St. Francis de Sales used to say, that a soul cannot ascend to the throne of God, unless the flesh is mortified and depressed. There are many beautiful remarks on this subject in the works of St. Teresa. *"It would be folly,"* says this great Saint, *"to think that God admits to his familiar friendship, those who seek their own ease. Sensuality and prayer are incompatible. Souls who truly love God, cannot desire repose."*

8. Mortifications merit great glory in heaven. If "every one who striveth for the mastery" abstains from whatever is calculated to diminish his strength, and thus endanger the conquest of a miserable earthly crown, how much more should we deny the flesh for the attainment of an eternal kingdom? *"And they indeed,"* says St. Paul, *"that they may receive a corruptible crown: but we an incorruptible one."* (1 Cor. ix. 25.) St. John saw all the saints with *"palms in their hands."* (Apoc. vii. 9.) From this passage we learn, that all the elect must be martyrs, either by the sword of the tyrant, or by the voluntary crucifixion

of the flesh. But while we meditate on the necessity of works of penance, we should, at the same time, remember that the pains of this life bear no proportion to the eternal glory that awaits us in paradise. "*The sufferings of this life,*" says St. Paul, "*are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.*" (Rom. viii. 18.) The few transitory mortifications which we practise here below, will produce complete and everlasting felicity. "*For,*" says the Apostle, "*that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an exceeding weight of glory.*" (2 Cor. iv. 17.)

9. Let us then animate our faith: our pilgrimage on earth will not be of long duration: our home is eternity. The glory which we shall there enjoy, will be proportioned to the mortifications we shall have practised here. St. Peter says the saints are the living stones of which the celestial Jerusalem is built. But before they are translated to the city which is above, they must be polished by the salutary chisel of penance. "*The wholesome chisel often went; many a saving stroke was spent; and the architect dealt heavy blows, the stones to polish, that compose this pile.*" (In officio ded. Eccles.) Let us consider each act of self-denial as a work which will prepare us for paradise. This thought will sweeten all our pains and all our toils. How pleasing is the

fatigue of a journey to him who is assured that he shall obtain possession of all the territory through which he travels? It is related in the "Spiritual Meadow," that a certain monk was anxious to exchange his cell for another nearer to the fountain from which he was accustomed to draw water. But, as he was one day going to the fountain, he heard his steps counted by a person behind him. Turning round he saw a young man, who said: I am an angel: I reckon your steps, that none of them may be without a reward. The monk immediately abandoned the intention of changing his cell; and even wished it to be more distant from the water, that he might be able to acquire greater merit.

10. Mortified religious enjoy peace and content in this life, as well as in the next. What greater happiness can a soul possess than to know, that by her mortifications she pleases God? The very privation of carnal pleasures, and even the pains of penance, are so many spiritual delights to a loving soul. Love cannot be at rest. He that loves God, cannot live without giving continual proofs of his affection. Now, a soul cannot give a stronger proof of her love for God, than the voluntary renunciation of earthly pleasures for his sake, and the oblation of her pains to him. A Christian enamoured of Jesus Christ, feels no pain in his penitential works. "*He that loves,*" says St. Augustine, "*labours not.*" (In



Manual.) "Who," says St. Teresa, "can behold his God covered with wounds and harassed by persecutions, without embracing and even desiring a portion of his Saviour's sufferings?" Hence St. Paul exclaimed, that he wished for no other delight or glory than the cross of the Redeemer. ("God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.") (Gal. vi. 14.) Again he says, that the crucifixion of the flesh is the test by which the true lovers of Jesus Christ may be known. "They that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences." (Gal. v. 24.) Worklings go in search of sensual gratifications; but the followers of Christ seek only corporal austerities. In conclusion, blessed sister, imagine that death is at hand, and that as yet you have done but little for paradise. Strive from this day forward to mortify yourself as much as possible, at least by abstinence from the pleasures which self-love seeks. Endeavour to profit of every opportunity of mortification. "Let not the part of a good gift overpass you." (Ecc. xiv. 14.) Consider every occasion of self-denial as a gift which God bestows upon you, that you may be able to merit greater glory in another life. And remember that what can be done today, cannot be performed tomorrow: for time past, never returns. To animate your fervour in the practice of mortification, I shall here place before your

eyes, in his own words, what St. John Climacus saw in a monastery called the Prison of Penitents: "*I saw,*" says the Saint, (in Scala Par. Grad.) "*some of them standing the whole night in the open air, to overcome sleep. I saw others with their eyes fixed on heaven, and with tears begging mercy from God. Others stood with their hands bound behind their shoulders, and their heads bowed down, as if they were unworthy to raise their eyes to heaven. Others remained on ashes, with their heads between their knees, and beat the ground with their forehead. Others deluged the floor with their tears. Others stood in the burning rays of the sun. Others, parched with thirst, were content with taking a few drops of water to prevent death. Others took a mouthful of bread, and then threw it out, saying, that he who has been guilty of beastly actions, is unworthy of the food of men. Some had their cheeks furrowed by continual streams of tears; and others had their eyes punctured. Others struck their breast with such violence that they began to spit blood. And I saw all with faces so pallid and emaciated, that they appeared to be so many corpses.*" The Saint then concludes by saying that, notwithstanding their fall, he considered them, on account of their penitential rigours, more happy than those who had never sinned, and never done penance. What shall be said of them who have fallen and have never atoned for their crime by expiatory works?

## PRAYER.

O my Spouse, assist me, and give me strength, that for the future I may serve you better than I have done for the past. Hitherto I have sought the gratification of my senses and of self-love, but have been regardless of offending you. But for the future, I desire only to please you who are so deserving of all my love. For the love of me, you have chosen a life of continual pains and sorrows. You have spared nothing to draw me to your love: and shall I continue to be as ungrateful as I have been for so many years? No, my Jesus, it shall not be so; I have sinned enough in my past life. Pardon me all my transgressions. I am sorry for them, and repent with my whole heart of all the displeasure I have given you by my irregular life. I now love you with my whole soul, and desire to do all that I can to please you in all things, and without reserve. Through my director, make known to me your will. I now propose, and hope with the assistance of your grace, to fulfil your will in all things. My beloved Redeemer, replenish my memory with holy thoughts, that I may always remember the sorrows which you have endured for my sake. Inflame my will with holy affections, that I may seek only what pleases you, and may desire only the accomplishment of your will, and to belong entirely to you. Grant, O Lord, that I may love you, and that

I may love you ardently. For, if I love you,  
 all pains will be sweet and agreeable to me.  
 Holy Virgin Mary, my mother, assist me to  
 please God during the remainder of my life.  
 In you I place all my hope.

## SECTION I.

*On the mortification of the eyes, and on  
modesty in general.*

1. ALMOST all our rebellious passions spring from unguarded looks : for, generally speaking, it is by the sight that all inordinate affections and desires are excited. Hence holy Job "*made a covenant with his eyes, that he would not so much as think upon a virgin.*" (C. xxxi. v. 1.) Why did he say, that he would not so much as think upon a virgin ? Should he not have said that *he made a covenant with his eyes, not to look at a virgin ?* No, he very properly said that he would not think upon a virgin ; because thoughts are so connected with looks, that the former cannot be separated from the latter ; and therefore, to escape the molestation of evil imaginations, he resolved never to fix his eyes on a woman. St. Augustine says : "*The thought follows the look ; delight comes after the thought ; and consent after delight.*" From the look, proceeds the thought ; from the thought the desire ; (for, as St. Francis de Sales says, what is not seen is not desired,) and to the desire succeeds the

consent. If Eve had not looked at the forbidden apple, she should not have fallen; but, because "*she saw that it was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and beautiful to behold*, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." (Gen. iii. 6.) The devil first tempts us to look, then to desire, and afterwards to consent.

2. St. Jerome says, that satan "*requires only a beginning on our part*." If we commence, he will complete our destruction. A deliberate glance at a person of a different sex, often enkindles an infernal spark, which consumes the soul. "Through the eyes," says St. Bernard, "the deadly arrow of love enters." (Ser. 13.) The first dart which wounds and frequently robs chaste souls of life, finds admission through the eyes. By them, holy David fell. By them, was Solomon, once the inspired of the Holy Ghost, drawn into the greatest abominations. O how many are lost by indulging their sight. The eyes must be carefully guarded by all who expect not to be obliged to join in the lamentation of Jeremiah: "*My eye hath wasted my soul*." (Jer. Thren. iii. 51.) By the introduction of sinful affections, my eyes have destroyed my soul. Hence St. Gregory says, that "*the eyes, because they draw us to sin, must be depressed*." (Mor. L. xxi. c. 2.) If not restrained, they will become instruments of hell, to force the soul to sin almost against her will. He that looks at a dangerous object, continues the saint, "*be-*

*gins to will what he willed not."* It was this the inspired writer intended to express, when he said of Holofernes, that "*the beauty of Judith made his soul captive.*" (Jud. xvi. 11.)

3. Seneca says, that "*blindness is a part of innocence;*" and Tertullian relates, that a certain Pagan philosopher, to free himself from impurity, plucked out his eyes. Such an act would be unlawful; but he that desires to preserve chastity, must avoid the sight of objects calculated to excite unchaste thoughts. "*Gaze not about,*" says the Holy Ghost, "*upon another's beauty . . . hereby lust is enkindled as a fire.*" (Ecc. ix. 8, 9.) Gaze not upon another's beauty: for, from looks arise evil imaginations, by which an impure fire is lighted up. Hence St. Francis de Sales used to say, that "*they who wish to exclude an enemy from the city, must keep the gates locked.*"

4. Hence, to avoid the sight of dangerous objects, the saints were accustomed to keep their eyes almost continually fixed on the earth, and to abstain even from looking at innocent objects. After being a novice for a year, St. Bernard could not tell whether his cell was vaulted. In consequence of never raising his eyes from the ground, he never knew that there were but three windows to the church of the monastery in which he spent his noviciate. He once, without perceiving the lake, walked along its banks for nearly an

entire day: hearing his companions speak about it, he asked when they had seen it. St. Peter of Alcantara kept his eyes constantly cast down, so that he did not know the brothers with whom he conversed: it was by the voice, and not by the countenance, that he was able to recognise them. The saints were particularly cautious not to look at persons of a different sex. St. Hugh, when compelled to speak with women, never looked at them in the face. St. Clare would never fix her eyes on the face of a man. She was greatly afflicted, because, when raising her eyes at the elevation to see the consecrated host, she once involuntarily saw the countenance of the priest. St. Lewis Gonzaga never looked at his own mother in the face. It is related of St. Arsenius, that a noble lady went to visit him in the desert, to beg of him to recommend her to God. When the saint perceived that his visitor was a woman, he turned away from her. She then said to him: Arsenius, since you will neither see nor hear me, at least remember me in your prayers. No, replied the saint, but I will beg of God to make me forget you, and never more to think of you.

5. From these examples may be seen the folly and temerity of some religious who, though they have not the sanctity of a St. Clare, still gaze around from the terrace, in the parlour, and in the church, upon every object that presents itself, even on persons of a differ-



ent sex. And notwithstanding their unguarded looks, they expect to be free from temptations and from the danger of sin. For having once looked deliberately at a woman who was gathering ears of corn, the Abbot Pastor was tormented, for forty years, by temptations against chastity. (Dial. L. c. 20.) St. Gregory states, that the temptation, to conquer which St. Benedict rolled himself in thorns, arose from one incautious glance at a female. St. Jerome, though living in a cave, in continual prayer and macerations of the flesh, was terribly molested by the remembrance of ladies whom he had long before seen in Rome. Why should not similar molestations be the lot of religious who wilfully and without reserve, fix their eyes on persons of a different sex? "It is not," says St. Francis de Sales, "the look, so much as the repetition of it, that proves fatal. *If,*" says St. Augustine, *"our eyes should by chance fall upon others, let us take care never to fix them upon any one."* (In reg. iii. c. 21.) Father Manareo, when taking leave of St. Ignatius for a distant place, looked steadfastly in his face: for this look he was corrected by the saint. From the conduct of St. Ignatius on this occasion, we learn that it is not becoming in religious to fix their eyes on the countenance of a person even of the same sex, particularly when the person is young. But I do not see how looks at young persons of a different sex can be excused from the guilt of a

venial fault, or even from mortal sin, when there is proximate danger of criminal consent. "*It is not lawful,*" says St. Gregory, "*to behold what it is not lawful to covet.*" The evil thought which proceeds from looks, though it should be rejected, never fails to leave a stain upon the soul. Brother Ruggiero, a Franciscan of singular purity, being once asked why he was so reserved in his intercourse with females, replied: that when men avoid the occasions of sin, God preserves them; but when they expose themselves to danger, they are justly abandoned by the Lord, and easily fall into some grievous transgression. (Lib. i. conform. S. Fran. 2.)

6. The indulgence of the eyes, if not productive of bad passions, at least destroys recollection during the time of prayer. For, the images and sensations excited by the objects seen before, or by the wanderings of the eyes, during prayer, will occasion a thousand distractions, and banish all recollection from the soul. It is certain that, without recollection, a religious can pay but little attention to the practice of humility, patience, mortification, or of the other virtues. Hence it is her duty to abstain from all looks of curiosity, which distract her mind from holy thoughts. Let her eyes be directed only to objects which raise the soul to God. St. Bernard used to say, that to fix the eyes upon the earth, contributes to keep the heart in heaven. "*Where,*" says St.

Gregory, "*Christ is, there modesty is found.*" (Epis. 193.) Wherever Jesus Christ dwells by love, there modesty is practised. However, I do not mean to say that the eyes should never be raised, or never fixed on any object. No; but they ought to be directed only to what inspires devotion, to sacred images, and to the beauties of creation, which elevate the soul to the contemplation of the Divinity. Except in looking at such objects, a religious should in general keep the eyes cast down, and particularly in places where they may fall upon dangerous objects. In conversing with men, she should never roll the eyes about to look at them, and much less to look at them a second time.

7. To practise modesty of the eyes, is the duty of a religious, not only because it is necessary for her own improvement in virtæ, but also, because it is necessary for the edification of others. God only knows the human heart: man sees only the exterior actions, and by them he is edified or scandalized. "*A man,*" says the Holy Ghost, "*is known by his look.*" (Ecc. xix. 26.) By the countenance the interior is known. Hence, like the baptist, a religious should be "*a burning and shining light.*" (John, v. 35.) She ought to be a torch burning with charity, and shining resplendent by her modesty, to all who behold her. To religious the following words of the Apostle are particularly applicable: "*We are made a spec-*

*tacle to the world, and to angels, and to men."*

(1 Cor. iv. 9.) And again: "*Let your modesty be known to all men: the Lord is nigh.*" (Phil. iv. 5.) Religious are attentively observed by the angels and by men; and therefore their modesty should be made manifest before all: if they do not practise modesty, terrible shall be the account which they must render to God on the day of judgment. O what devotion does a modest religious inspire by keeping her eyes always cast down? St. Francis of Assisium once said to his companion that he was going out to preach. After walking through the town, with his eyes fixed on the ground, he returned to the convent. His companion asked him when he would preach the sermon. We have, replied the Saint, by the modesty of our looks, given an excellent instruction to all who saw us. It is related of St. Lewis Gonzaga, that when he walked through Rome, the students would stand in the streets to observe and admire his modesty.

8. St. Ambrose says, that, to men of the world, the modesty of the saints is a powerful exhortation to virtue. "*The look of a just man is an admonition to many.*" (In Ps. 118.) The Saint adds: "*How delightful is it to do good to others by your appearance.*" It is related of St. Bernardine of Sienna, that even when a secular, his presence was sufficient to restrain the licentiousness of his young companions, who, as soon as they saw him, were

accustomed to give to each other, notice of his coming. On his arrival, they became silent, or changed the subject of their conversation. It is likewise related of St. Gregory of Nyssa, and of St. Ephrem, that their very appearance inspired piety, and that the sanctity and modesty of their exterior edified and improved all who beheld them. When Innocent the second visited St. Bernard at Clairvaux, such was the exterior modesty of the saint and of his monks, that the Pope and his cardinals were moved to tears of devotion. Surius relates a very extraordinary fact of St. Lucian, a monk and martyr. (Die 7. Jan.) By his modesty he induced so many Pagans to embrace the faith, that the emperor Maximinian, fearing that he should be converted to Christianity by the appearance of the saint, would not allow the holy man to be brought within his view; but spoke to him from behind a screen. That our Redeemer was the first who taught, by his example, modesty of the eyes, may, as a learned author remarks, be inferred from the holy evangelists, who say that, on some occasions, he raised his eyes. "*And he, lifting up his eyes on his disciples.*" (Luc. vi. 20.) "*When Jesus therefore had lifted up his eyes.*" (John, vi. 5.) From these passages we may conclude that the Redeemer ordinarily kept his eyes cast down. Hence the Apostle, praising the modesty of the Saviour, says: "*I beseech you, by the mildness and modesty of*

*Christ.*" (2 Cor. x. 1.) I shall conclude this subject with what St. Basil said to his monks: If, my children, we desire to raise the soul towards heaven, let us direct the eyes towards the earth. From the moment we awake in the morning let us pray continually, in the words of holy David: "*Turn away my eyes, that they may not behold vanity.*" (Ps. cxviii. 37.)

*On modesty in general.*

9. We must practise modesty, not only in our looks, but also in our whole deportment, and particularly in our dress, our walk, our conversation, and all similar actions. Modesty of dress is not incompatible with neatness or cleanliness. But, how disedifying is the conduct of the religious who attends too much to the neatness of her person, and to the fineness or richness of her apparel?—who wears superfluous ornaments?—whose dress is made in a manner calculated to attract notice?—and whose whole appearance exhibits nothing but worldly vanity? Speaking of seculars, St. Cyprian says, that "*females, decorated with gold, necklaces, and precious stones, lose the ornaments of the soul.*" (De hab. vir. lib. iv.) What would the saint have thought of religious who imitate worldlings in the vanity of their dress? "The ornaments of a woman are," says St. Gregory Nazianzen, "to be conspicuous for probity; to converse with the divine

oracles: *to seek wool and take hold of the spindle; and to keep a restraint on her eyes and on her lips.*" (Adver. mul. se orn.) Yes, the ornaments of holy women are probity of life; continual conversation with God by prayer; constant labour; and a perpetual guard over the eyes and the tongue, by modesty, and by silence.

10. A religious should be modest in her walk. "*Let your gait,*" says St. Basil, "*be neither slow, nor vehement.*" (Ep. ad Greg.) Your walk, to be modest, must be grave; neither too quick, nor too slow. A religious must practise modesty in sitting. She must avoid every slothful posture: she must abstain from crossing the feet, and from putting one leg on the other. She must be modest at meals, by taking her food without avidity, and without rolling her eyes around in all directions, as if to observe how, and what the others eat.

11. Above all, a religious must be modest in her conversation, by abstaining from all words unbecoming the religious state. She must be persuaded that all words which savour of the world, are indecorous in a religious. "*If,*" says St. Basil, "*a worldling make use of scurrilous expressions, he is not noticed. But, if a man who professes to lead a perfect life, appear to depart in the slightest degree from his duty, he is instantly remarked by all.*" (In reg. qu. 22.) In a secular, no one observes

indecent words, because they are common in the world: but, if religious who profess to aspire to sanctity, be guilty of the smallest impropriety, universal attention is immediately directed to their conduct. To observe modesty in words at the common recreations, you must attend to the following rules:—First, you must abstain from all murmuring, even against manifest abuses. Secondly, you must never interrupt a person who is speaking. “*And,*” says the Holy Ghost, “*interrupt not others in the midst of their discourse.*” (Ecc. xi. 8.) How scandalous is it to see a religious engrossing to herself the whole conversation?—to see her ready to stop the sisters in the middle of a word, or of a sentence, and thus show her pride by pretending to know every thing, and by constituting herself mistress of all? Such conduct is a source of great annoyance to all who join in the conversation. However, every religious should speak occasionally during the hours of recreation, and particularly when the others are silent: for, should all abstain from speaking, the end of the rule which prescribes recreation, would be frustrated. But modesty requires, particularly from the young, that, after speaking as much as will be necessary for the ends of the recreation, they shew a stronger inclination to listen than to speak. The best rule, then, is to speak when others are silent, and to be silent when others are speaking. Thirdly, you must abstain from certain jests



and jocose remarks on the real and known defects of others: for, such jokes offend the persons to whom they are applied. Fourthly, you must never utter a word of self-praise: when you are praised by others, you must raise your heart to God, and change the subject of conversation; and, when you are contradicted or ridiculed, you must not be angry. Whenever the companions of St. John Francis Regis made him the subject of their jests at recreation, he endeavoured with great good humour, to keep up the conversation, that, by being the object of their laughter, he might contribute to their amusement. Fifthly, you must speak always in a low tone, and never in such a manner as to offend the ears of others. "*Let no one,*" says St. Ambrose, "*offend by too loud a voice.*" (Lib. i. de off. c. 18.) Sixthly, you must observe modesty and moderation in laughter. St. Gregory relates, that the mother of God appeared once to a devout virgin, called Musa, and told her that, without restraining immoderate laughter, she would not please Jesus Christ. "*They who seek after piety,*" says St. Basil, "*must take care not to pour forth their souls in laughter.*" (In reg. ques. 17.) All who aspire to perfection, should avoid excessive laughter. Moderate laughter, which shews the serenity of the soul, is neither a violation of decorum, nor opposed to devotion. A religious should always present an appearance of modesty and devotion; but not

of sadness and melancholy. By appearing sad and afflicted, she dishonours religion, and gives all who behold her to understand, that sanctity, instead of infusing peace and joy, fills the soul with sorrow and bitterness. But, by a cheerful countenance, she encourages others to the practice of piety. Two courtiers (Rosign. verité Et.) of a certain monarch, having witnessed the joy with which an aged monk remained in solitude, renounced the world, and betook themselves to his retreat. Seventhly and lastly, you must not speak of things of the world; such as marriages, feasts, comedies, or of splendid dresses: you must not speak of eating, nor praise or censure the dishes that are brought to table. St. Francis de Sales used to say, that "*a man of spirit never thinks of the table but when he sits at it.*" When religious hear unseemly discourses, they should, like St. Lewis Gonzaga, propose some useful question, or take occasion, from what is said, to introduce some pious subject of conversation. To be able to converse with his companions on spiritual subjects during recreation, he was accustomed to spend, each day, half an hour in reading the life of a saint, or some other book of devotion. When among the juniors, he was the first to introduce a religious subject: when with priests, or with his seniors, he proposed a case of conscience, as if for his own information, and thus succeeded in making the conversation turn upon holy things. In a

short time his companions knew that he did not relish any but pious conversation, and therefore they sought on every occasion to gratify his wishes: should they happen to be discoursing on any other subject, when he came among them, they would immediately begin to speak on God. Every one is inclined to speak continually of what he tenderly loves. St. Ignatius of Loyola appeared not to know how to speak of any thing but God, and was therefore called *the Father who speaks always of God*.

#### PRAYER.

My Jesus, pardon me, for your mercy's sake, the numberless faults which I have committed for want of sufficient modesty, and of which I now repent with my whole heart. All my defects have arisen from my little love of you. I acknowledge that I do not deserve mercy: but your wounds and your death encourage and oblige me to hope. O my God! how often have I insulted you?—and with what tenderness have you pardoned all my sins? I have promised to be faithful to you, and still I have returned to my sins! Shall I wait till you abandon me to my tepidity, and thus to eternal misery? I desire, O Lord, to amend; and I place all my confidence in you, and propose to seek continually your assistance to be faithful to you. Hitherto I have trusted in my own resolutions, and have ne-

glected to recommend myself to you. This self-confidence and neglect of prayer have been the cause of my past sins. Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me and assist me: give me grace to recommend myself to you in all my wants. I love you, O my Sovereign good, and desire to love you with all my strength; but without you I can do nothing. Give me your love: give me holy perseverance. I hope for all things from your infinite goodness. O Mary, mother of God, you know how much I confide in you; assist me; have pity on me.

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## SECTION II.

*On the mortification of the appetite.*

1. St. Andrew Avellini said, that he who wishes to advance in perfection, should begin zealously to mortify the appetite. "*It is impossible,*" says St. Gregory, "*to engage in the spiritual conflict, without the previous subjugation of the appetite.*" (Mor. L. xxx. c. 13.) Father Raggacci, in his "*Treatise on the one thing necessary,*" asserts, that the greater part of external penance consists in the mortification of the palate. Since the mortification of the taste consists in abstinence from food, must we then abstain altogether from eating? No: it is our duty to preserve the life of the body, that we may be able to serve God as long as he wills us to remain on earth. But, as Father Vincent Caraffa used to say, we should attend to the body with the same feelings of disgust, as a powerful monarch would perform, by compulsion, the meanest work of a servant. "*To live,*" says St. Francis de Sales, "*we must eat; but we should not live as if for the purpose of eating.*" Some, like beasts, appear to live only for the gratification

of the palate. "*A man,*" says St. Bernard, "*becomes a beast, by loving what beasts love.*" Whoever, like brute animals, fixes his heart on the indulgence of the appetite, falls from the dignity of a spiritual and rational creature, and sinks to the level of senseless beasts. Unhappy Adam, for the pleasure of eating an apple, is "*compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them.*" In another place, St. Bernard says that, on seeing Adam forget his God and his eternal salvation, for the momentary gratification of his palate, *the beasts of the fields, if they could speak, would exclaim: "Behold, Adam is become one of us."* (In Cant. Ser. 35.) Hence St. Catherine of Sienna used to say, that, "*without mortifying the taste, it is impossible to preserve innocence, since it was by the indulgence of his appetite, that Adam fell.*" Ah! how miserable is the condition of those "*whose God is their belly?*" (Phil. iii. 19.)

2. How many have lost their souls by intemperance? In his Dialogues, (lib. iv. c. 38,) St. Gregory relates, that, in a monastery of Sienna, there was a monk who led a very exemplary life. When he was at the point of death, the religious, expecting to be edified by his last moments, gathered around him. "*Brethren,*" said the dying man, "*when you fasted, I eat in private, and therefore I have been already delivered over to satan who now deprives me of life, and carries away my soul.*"

After these words, he expired. The same saint relates, in another place, (dial. l. c. 4,) that a certain nun, seeing in the garden a very fine lettuce, pulled and eat it, in opposition to her rule. She was instantly possessed by a devil who tormented her grievously. Her companions called to her aid the holy Abbot Equitius, at whose arrival the demon exclaimed: "*What evil have I done? I sat upon the lettuce: she came and eat it.*" The holy man, by his commands, compelled the evil spirit to depart. In the Cistercian Records, (Vinc spec. his. lib. vii. c. 108,) we read, that St. Bernard, once visiting his novices, called aside a brother whose name was Acardo, and said that a certain novice, to whom he pointed, would, on that day, fly from the monastery. The saint begged of Acardo to watch the novice, and to prevent his escape. On the following night, Acardo saw a demon approach the novice, and by the savoury smell of a roasted fowl, tempt him to desire forbidden food. The unhappy young man awoke, and, yielding to the temptation, took his clothes, and prepared to leave the monastery. Acardo endeavoured, in vain, to convince him of the dangers to which he would be exposed in the world. Overcome by gulosity, the unhappy man obstinately resolved to return to the world: there, (the narrator adds) he died miserably.

3. Let us then take care not to be conquered by this brutal vice. St. Augustine

says, that food is necessary for the support of life: but, like medicine, it should be taken only through necessity. Intemperance is very injurious to the body as well as the soul. It is certain, that excess in eating is the cause of almost all the diseases of the body. Apoplexy, diarrhoea, head-aches, complaints of the stomach and bowels, and innumerable other maladies, spring from the immoderate use of food. But, the diseases of the body are only a small part of the evils that flow from intemperance: its effects on the soul are far more disastrous. This vice, according to St. Thomas, (2. 2. qu. 148, a. 6,) in the first place, darkens the soul, and renders her unfit for spiritual exercises, but particularly for prayer. As fasting prepares the mind for the contemplation of God, and of eternal goods, so intemperance diverts it from holy thoughts. St. Chrysostom says, that the glutton, like an overloaded ship, moves with difficulty; and that, in the first storm of temptation, he is in danger of being lost.

4. "*Take,*" says St. Bernard, "*even bread with moderation, lest a loaded stomach should make you weary of prayer.*" (In Cant. Ser. 66.) And again he says: "*If you compel a person who takes a heavy meal, to watch, you will extort from him wailing, rather than singing.*" (Apol. ad Guiliel.) Hence, it is the duty of religious to eat sparingly, and particularly at supper: for, in the evening a false appetite is frequently created by the acid pro-



duce of the food taken at dinner. Whoever satisfies his appetite in the evening, is exposed to great danger of excess; and, in consequence of indigestion, will frequently feel his stomach overburdened in the morning, and his head so stupid and confused, that he will not be able to say an *Ave Maria*. Do not imagine that the Almighty will, at the time of prayer, infuse his consolations into the souls of those who, like senseless beasts, seek delight in the indulgence of the appetite. "*Divine consolation*," says St. Bernard, "*is not given to those who admit any other delight*." (Ser. 6, de Ascen.) Celestial consolations are not bestowed on those who go in search of earthly pleasures.

5. Besides, he who gratifies the taste, will readily indulge the other senses: for, having lost the spirit of recollection, he will easily commit faults, by indecent words, and by unbecoming gestures. But the greatest evil of intemperance is, that it exposes chastity to great danger. "*Repletion of the stomach*," says St. Jerome, "*is the hotbed of lust*." (In Jov.) Excess in eating is a powerful incentive to incontinence. Hence Cassian says, that "*it is impossible for him who satiates his appetite, not to experience conflicts*." (Inst. lib. ix. c. 13.) The intemperate cannot expect to be free from temptations against purity. To preserve chastity, the saints practised the most rigorous mortifications of the appetite. "*The devil*," says St. Thomas, "*vanguished by tem-*

*perance, does not tempt to lust."* When his temptations to indulge the palate are conquered, he ceases to provoke incontinence.

6. He that attends to the abnegation of the appetite, makes continual progress in virtue. That the mortification of the palate will facilitate the conquest of the other senses, and enable us to employ them in acts of virtue, may be inferred from the following prayer of the church: "O God who, by this bodily fast, extinguishest our vices, elevatest our understanding, bestowest on us virtue and its reward." (Preface for Lent.) By fasting, the Lord enables the soul to subdue her passions, to raise her affections above the earth, to practise virtue, and to acquire merits for eternity. Worldlings say: God has created the goods of this earth for our use and pleasure. Such is not the language of the saints. The venerable Vincent Caraffa, of the society of Jesus, used to say, that God has given us the goods of the earth, not only that we may enjoy them, but also that we may have the means of thanking him, and shewing him our love, by the voluntary renunciation of his gifts, and by the oblation of them to his glory. To abandon, for God's sake, all worldly enjoyments, has always been the practice of holy souls. The ancient monks, as St. Jerome relates, thought it a great defect to make use of food dressed with fire. Their daily sustenance consisted of a pound of bread. St. Lewis Gonzaga, though

always sickly, fasted three times in the week on bread and water. St. Francis Xavier, during his missions, was satisfied each day with a few grains of toasted rice. St. John Francis Regis, in his greatest fatigues, took no other food than a little flour steeped in water. The daily support of St. Peter of Alcantara, was but a small quantity of broth. We read, in the life of the venerable brother John Joseph of the cross, who lived in our own days, and with whom I was intimately acquainted, that, for twenty-four years, he fasted very often on bread and water, and never eat any thing but bread and a little herbs or fruit. When commanded, on account of his infirmities, to use warm food, he took only bread dipped in broth. When the physician ordered him to take a little wine, he mixed it with his broth, to increase the insipidity of his scanty repast. I do not mean to say that, to attain sanctity, it is necessary for nuns to imitate these examples: but I assert, that whoever is attached to the pleasures of the table, or does not seriously attend to the mortification of the appetite, will never make progress in virtue. In religious communities there are generally two refectories in the day: hence, they who neglect the mortification of the taste, will daily commit a thousand faults.

§ 7. Let us now come to the practice of denying the appetite. In what is it to be mortified? St. Bonaventure answers: "*In the*

*quantity, the quality, and the manner."* (De prof. Rel. L. i. c. 47.) In the quality, adds the saint, by seeking not what is delicate, but what is simple. The saint says, in another place, that small is the progress of the religious who is not content with what is offered to her, but requires that it be prepared in a different manner, or seeks more palatable food. A mortified religious is satisfied with what is placed before her; and, instead of seeking after delicacies, she selects, among all the dishes that may be presented to her, the least palatable, provided it be not prejudicial to health. Such was the practice of St. Lewis Gonzaga, who always chose what was most disagreeable to the taste. "*Wine and flesh*," says St. Clement of Alexandria, "*give strength indeed to the body, but they render the soul languid*." (Strom. I. vii.) From the sacred canons we learn, that formerly monks were not permitted even to taste flesh. "*To a monk, the privilege of tasting flesh is not granted*" (De consec. Dist. 5.) Speaking of himself, St. Bernard says: "*I abstain from flesh, lest I should cherish the vices of the flesh*." (Ser. 66, in Cant.) "*Give not wine to kings*," says the wise man. (Prov. xxxi. 4.) By kings, in this place, we are to understand not the monarchs of the earth, but the servants of God, who rule their wicked passions and subject them to reason. In another place, Solomon says: "*Who hath wo? Surely they that*

*pass their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups.*" (Prov. xxiii. 30.) Since then the word *wo*, in the sacred scriptures, according to St. Gregory, signifies everlasting misery, *wo*, eternal *wo*, shall be the lot of all who are addicted to wine! Because "*wine is a luxurious thing*," (Prov. xx. 1,) and incites to incontinence. "*My first advice*," says St. Jerome, in one of his epistles to the virgin Eustochia, "*is, that the spouse of Christ fly from wine as from poison. Wine and youth are a twofold incentive to pleasure.*" (Ep. 22.) If you desire to preserve the chastity which becomes the spouse of Jesus, avoid wine as poison: wine and youth impel, with double ardour, to unlawful pleasures. From the words of the holy doctor we may infer, that he who has not enough of courage, or of bodily strength, to abstain altogether from flesh, and from wine, should, at least, use them with great moderation: otherwise, he must be prepared for continual molestation from temptations against purity.

8. A mortified religious would also do well to abstain from superfluous seasonings, which serve only to gratify the palate. The seasonings used by the saints were ashes, aloes, and wormwood. I do not require such mortifications of you; neither do I recommend very extraordinary fasts. On the contrary, it is, according to Cassian, the duty of all who are not solitaries, and who live in community, to

avoid, as a source of much vain glory, whatever is not conformable to the common usages of the monastery. "*Where,*" says St. Philip Neri, "*there is a common table, all should eat of what is served up.*" Hence he frequently exhorted his disciples, "*to avoid all singularity as the origin of spiritual pride.*" But, a courageous religious finds opportunities of practising mortification without allowing it to appear to others. St. John Climacus partook of whatever was laid before him : but his refec-tion consisted in tasting rather than in eating what was offered to him ; and thus, by his abstemiousness, he practised continual mortification of the appetite without the danger of vanity. St. Bernard used to say, that he who lives in community, will take more pleasure in fasting once, while his companions at table take their ordinary repast, than in fasting seven times with them. However, religious may, without the danger of vain glory, occasionally perform very rigorous mortifications ; for example, by living on bread and water on Fridays, Saturdays, on the vigils of the Blessed Virgin, and on similar occasions : for, such fasts are ordinarily practised by fervent religious.

9. If, on account of bodily infirmity, or through want of fervour, you do not practise rigid fasts, you should at least not complain of the common fare, and should be content with whatever is brought to table. St. Thomas never asked for particular food, but was al-

ways satisfied with what was placed before him, and eat of it with great moderation. Of St. Ignatius, we read that he never refused any dish, and never complained that the food was not well dressed, or well seasoned. It is the duty of the superior to provide the community with wholesome food: but a religious should never complain when what is laid before her is rear or overdone; when it is scanty, smoked, insipid, or too highly seasoned with salt. The poor, provided they receive what is necessary for the support of life, take what is offered to them without conditions or complaints: and, a religious should, in like manner, accept whatever is laid before her as an alms from Almighty God.

10. With regard to the quantity, St. Bonaventure says, that "*food ought not to be taken too often, or in excess, but in such a quantity that it may be a refection, and not a burden to the body.*" Hence, the rule of all who seek perfection is, never to eat to satiety. "*Let your repast be moderate,*" says St. Jerome, "*so that the stomach will never be replete.*" (Ep. 22. ad Eust.) Some religious fast one day, and eat to excess on the next. St. Jerome says, that it is better to take always a reasonable quantity of food, than to fast sometimes, and afterwards commit excess. The same holy doctor remarks, that satiety is to be avoided in the use, not only of delicacies, but *also of the coarsest food.*" (In Jov. lib. ii.)

If a nun commit excess, it matters not whether she eat of partridges, or of pulse: the bad effects of her intemperance are the same in both cases. St. Jerome's rule for determining the quantity of food is, that a person should always rise from table in such a state, that he may be able to apply immediately to prayer or to study. "*When,*" says the holy doctor, "*you eat, think that it will be your duty to pray or to read immediately after.*" (Ep. ad Furiam.) An ancient Father used to say, that "*he who eats a great deal, and is still hungry, will receive a greater reward than the man who eats little, and is satiated.*" Cassian relates, (Ins. l. v. c. 26,) that, to comply with the duty of hospitality, a certain monk was one day obliged to sit at table very often with strangers, and to partake of the refreshment prepared for them; and that after all, he got up the last time with an appetite. This is the best and most difficult sort of mortification. For it is easier to abstain altogether from certain meats, than, after having tasted them, to eat but little.

11. He who desires to practise moderation in eating, would do well to diminish his meals gradually, till, by experience, he ascertains the quantity of food necessary for the support of the body. It was in this manner that St. Dorothy trained his disciple, St. Dositheus, to the just practice of mortification. But the most secure means of removing all doubts and



scruples with regard to fasts and abstinence is, to follow the advice of your director. St. Bernard says, that mortifications which are performed without the permission of one's confessor, are not meritorious, because they are the fruit of a criminal presumption. "*What is done without the permission of the spiritual father, will be regarded as presumption, and shall not be rewarded.*" (In reg. c. 49.) All, but particularly nuns, should make it a general rule to eat sparingly at supper, even when there is some apparent necessity for a plentiful meal: for, in the evening all are subject to a false appetite, and therefore a slight excess will occasion, on the following morning, headaches, fullness of the stomach, and by consequence, a repugnance and incapacity for all spiritual exercises.

12. Abstinence from drink, except at meals, may be safely observed by all, unless when, in particular circumstances, such as in the heats of summer, the want of liquid might be prejudicial to health. However, St. Lawrence Justinian, even in the burning heats of summer, never drank out of meals: and to those who asked how he could bear the thirst, he replied: "*How shall I be able to bear the burning thirst of purgatory, if I cannot now abstain from drink?*" On fast days, the ancient Christians abstained from drink till the hour of their repast, which was always taken in the evening. Such is the practice of

the Turks, at the present day, during their fasts of lent. We should, at least, observe the rule which is universally prescribed by physicians, not to take any drink for four or five hours after dinner.

13. With regard to the manner of eating, St. Bonaventure says, *that food should not be taken unseasonably, nor inordinately, but religiously.* Food should not be taken unseasonably; that is, before the hours prescribed for the community. To a penitent who could not abstain from eating till the hour of meals, St. Philip Neri said: "*Child, if you do not correct this defect, you shall never advance in virtue.*" "*Blessed,*" says the Holy Ghost, "*is the land, whose princes eat in due season.*" (Ecc. x. 17.) And happy the monastery whose members never eat out of the hours of meals. When St. Teresa heard that some of her nuns had asked permission from the provincial to keep eatables in their cells, she reproved them very severely: "*Your request,*" said the saint, "*if granted, would lead to the destruction of the monastery.*"

14. To avoid the fault of *taking your food inordinately*, you must be careful not to eat with avidity, with eagerness, or with haste. "*Be not greedy in your feasting,*" says the Holy Ghost. (Ecc. xxxvii. 32.) Your object in eating must be to support the strength of the body, and to be able to serve the Lord. To eat through mere pleasure, cannot be ex-

cused from the guilt of venial sin. For, Innocent XI. has condemned the proposition which asserts, that it is not a sin to eat or to drink from the sole motive of satisfying the palate. However, it is not a fault to feel pleasure in eating: for it is, generally speaking, impossible to eat without experiencing the delight which food naturally produces. But, it is a defect to eat, like beasts, through the sole motive of sensual gratification, and without any reasonable object. Hence, the most delicious meats may be eaten without sin, if the motive be good and worthy of a rational creature; and, in taking the coarsest food through attachment to pleasure, there may be a fault. In the lives of the Fathers it is related, that, though the same food was served to all the monks of a certain monastery, a holy bishop saw some of them feasting on honey, others on bread, and others on mire. (Lib. de Provid. c. 25.) By this vision he was given to understand, that the first eat with a holy fear of violating temperance, and were accustomed, at meals, to raise their souls to God by holy aspirations: that the second felt some delight in eating, but still returned thanks to God for his benefits; and, that the third eat for the mere gratification of the taste.

15. To practise temperance, *in the manner of eating*, you must not perform indiscreet fasts which would render you unable to serve the community, or to observe your rule. Trans-

ported with a certain fervour, by which the Almighty animates their zeal for virtue, beginners are often very indiscreet in their fasts and other works of penance. Their rigours sometimes bring on infirmities, which disqualify them for the duties of the community, and sometimes make them give up all exercises of piety. Discretion is necessary in all things. A master who intrusts a servant with the care of a horse will be equally displeased, whether the animal be rendered unfit for use, by an excess or by a want of food. St. Francis de Sales used to say to his Nuns of the Visitation, that "*continual moderation is better than fits of violent abstinence interspersed with occasional excesses. Besides, such abstinences make us esteem ourselves more holy than others who do not practise them.*" It is certainly the duty of all to avoid indiscretion: but it has been justly remarked by a great spiritual master—and the remark deserves attention—that the spirit seldom deceives us by suggesting excessive mortifications; while the flesh, under false pretences, frequently claims commiseration, and procures an exemption from what is displeasing to its propensities.

16. Abstinence from delicacies agreeable to the taste, and in some measure injurious to health, is a very useful mortification. It will also be very profitable to refrain from the fruits which come first into season; and, throughout the year, from some particular fruit determined

by lot: to abstain once or twice in the week from all fruit, and every day from a portion of what is laid before you: to deny yourself some delicacy, or merely to taste it, and say with St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, that it is not useful for you; and to leave, every day, according to the advice of St. Bernard, a part of what is most pleasing to the palate. "*Let every one,*" says the saint, "*offer at table something to God.*" (In reg. c. 49.) It will be very salutary to check for some time the desire of drinking or of eating what is before you; and to abstain from wine, spirits, and spices. Such abstinence is particularly adapted to young persons. The preceding mortifications may be practised without pride, or injury to health. It is not necessary to perform all of them. Let each person observe the abstinences which her superior or director permits. It is certainly better to practise small and frequent works of penance, than to perform rare and extraordinary fasts, and afterwards lead an unmortified life. With regard to the other acts of self-denial which may be practised in the refectory, observe the directions given in the 24th chapter, which treats of the rule of life.

#### PRAYER.

My dear Redeemer, I am so tepid and full of defects, that I am ashamed to appear before you. Had I corresponded with your graces, I

should now be a seraph by the ardour of my love. But I am more imperfect than ever. How often have I promised to become a saint, and to consecrate myself entirely to you? But my promises have been so many treasons. I console myself with the reflection, that I have to deal with Infinite goodness. Do not abandon me, O Lord, but continue to strengthen me: for I desire to amend, by the assistance of your grace. I do not wish to resist the love which you bear to me: I see that you wish me to become a saint; and, to please you, I desire to sanctify my soul. I promise to mortify my senses particularly by abstaining from certain pleasures. (*Name them.*) Ah, my Jesus, I know that, to gain my heart, you have done too much: great indeed should be my ingratitude, if I denied you any thing, or loved you but little. I do not wish to be any longer ungrateful. You have been infinitely good to me: I shall not be ungenerous to you as I have hitherto been. I love you, O my Spouse: I am sorry for all the displeasure I have given you. Pardon me, and assist me to be faithful to you. O Mary, you have always been faithful to God: obtain for me the gift of fidelity to his graces during the remainder of my life.

### SECTION III.

*On the mortification of the senses of hearing,  
of smell, and of touch.*

THE sense of hearing must be mortified by not listening to indecent words, to murmurings, or to worldly conversations, which fill the mind with a thousand thoughts and images, that afterwards distract and disturb the soul in prayer and in the other exercises of devotion. Should you ever happen to be present at such discourses, endeavour to cut them short by proposing some useful question. If that be not sufficient, you ought either to retire, or remain silent, and cast down your eyes, to shew how much you dislike such language. To mortify the smell, you must abstain from the use of perfumes and of scented waters: such delicacies are unbecoming even in worldlings. Animated by the spirit of charity and mortification, the saints feel as much delight in the offensive odours which surround the sick and the infected, as they would, in a garden of the most fragrant flowers. Let it be your study to imitate their example, and to bear patiently the disagreeable smell which

you may experience in the rooms of the sick. With regard to the touch, you must take the greatest care to avoid all, even the smallest defects: for, every fault committed by the indulgence of that sense, exposes the soul to eternal death. I cannot explain myself fully on this subject: I shall only say that, to preserve the precious jewel of purity, religious should observe all possible modesty and caution, not only towards others, but also towards themselves. Even in his last agony, St. Peter of Alcantara would not allow any of his brethren to touch any part of his body. Feeling himself touched by one of them, he exclaimed: "*Withdraw, touch me not; I am still alive, and may still offend God.*" This sense of touch must be kept under the greatest restraint, by external mortifications, of which I shall now speak.

2. These mortifications are reduced to four heads—to fasts, haircloths, disciplines, and watchings. In the preceding section, enough has been said of fasting. Haircloths are of various kinds: some are made of strong or coarse hair; the others are bands or chains of brass or iron wire. The former may be injurious to persons of a delicate constitution: for, as Father Scaramelli justly remarks, (tom. i. tract. 2, ar. 1, c. 4,) they inflame the flesh, and weaken the stomach, by drawing its natural heat to the external surface of the body. The latter may be worn on the arms, legs, or



shoulders, without injury to the health; but not on the breast, or around the body. These are the ordinary species of haircloths, and may be safely used by all. Far different from them were the haircloths worn by the saints. D. Sancia Carriglio, the celebrated penitent of Father M. Avila, wore a shirt of coarse hair, which reached from the neck to the knees. St. Rose of Lima used a long hair shirt, interwoven with needles, and carried a broad iron chain round her loins. St. Peter of Alcantara wore on his shoulders a large plate of iron, which was so rough, and covered with sharp projections, that it kept the flesh in a state of continual laceration. Would it then be too much for you to wear a small band of iron from morning till the hour of dinner?

3. *Disciplines, or flagellations*, are a species of mortification strongly recommended by St. Francis de Sales, and universally adopted in religious communities of both sexes. All the modern saints, without a single exception, have continually practised this sort of penance. It is related of St. Lewis Gonzaga, that he often scourged himself unto blood, three times in the day. And, at the point of death, not having sufficient strength to use the lash, he besought the provincial to have him disciplined from head to foot. Surely, then, it would not be too much for you to take the discipline once in the day, or, at least, three or four times in the week. However, the practice of

this penance should be regulated by the confessor.

4. Lastly, *vigils* or *watchings* consist in the retrenchment of sleep. It is related of St. Rose, that, to prevent sleep, and thus be able to spend the night in prayer, she tied her hair to a nail fastened in the wall. When she was overcome by sleep, the inclination of the head caused pain sufficient to awake her. Of St. Peter of Alcantara we read, that for forty years he slept but an hour, or, at the most, an hour and a half, each night; and, that he might not be overcome by sleep, he lay with his head on a piece of wood fixed in the wall of his cell. Such austerities cannot be practised by all, or without a special grace. Indeed, watching is a species of penance, in which great moderation and discretion should be observed. Severe watchings generally render us unfit for the exercise of the mental faculties, for the recitation of the office, for prayer, and spiritual reading. St. Charles Borromeo, in consequence of watching during the night, was sometimes overcome by sleep, even during public functions, and was therefore obliged to prolong the time for rest. However, they who pretend to virtue, should not, like brute animals, give to their body all the repose which the flesh desires. It is necessary to take as much rest as is requisite, and no more. Generally speaking, females require less sleep than men. In general, five, or at the most, six hours' sleep, is

sufficient for females. At least, O blessed sister, be careful to rise at the first sound of the morning bell, and not to remain, like the sluggard, turning about in bed, after having heard the signal for rising. St. Teresa used to say, that a religious should leap out of bed the instant she hears the bell.

5. The saints have not only curtailed the time for sleep, but have also practised various mortifications in the manner of taking repose. St. Lewis Gonzaga was accustomed to scatter fragments of wood and of stones over his bed. St. Rose of Lima lay on the trunks of trees, the space between which, was filled with broken earthen ware. The venerable St. Mary Crucified, of Sicily, used a pillow of thorns. These austerities are extraordinary, and are not adapted to all persons. But, a religious should not seek a bed of down: if a straw bed be not injurious to her health, why should she require a mattress of hair?—or, if a single mattress be sufficient for her, why does she make use of two?

6. To bear with patience the excessive heat or cold of the seasons, is a very useful mortification of the sense of touch. St. Peter of Alcantara went barefooted and bareheaded throughout the winter; and never wore more than a single coat, which was generally torn. You cannot practise such rigours: but, would it be too much for you to refrain from approaching the fire during the winter?

St. Lewis Gonzaga, even when he lived in Lombardy, where the cold is very intense, never approached the fire. . . You can, at least on one day in the week, bear with patience, and accept as a penance from the hands of God, the cold and heat of the seasons. St. Francis Borgia, on his arriving one night at a college in the country, found the gates locked, and was therefore obliged to remain all night under the snow, which fell heavily. In the morning the religious expressed great regret at what had happened. Be assured, replied the saint, that, though I suffered much in the body, I have been greatly consoled in spirit by the reflection, that God rejoiced at my pains: it appeared to me, that God himself sent me from heaven those drops of snow which fell upon me.

#### PRAYER.

My beloved Redeemer, I blush to appear before you with so many attachments to earthly pleasures. During life, you thought of nothing but of suffering for me. But, forgetful of your pains, and of your love for me, I have hitherto attended only to my own gratification. In my past life I have had nothing of the character of a religious, and of your spouse, except the habit and the name. I would deserve to be banished from this holy place, where you have favoured me with so many lights and graces, which I have always repaid with ingratitude.

I have certainly made many good purposes ; and though I have frequently promised, I have not fulfilled them. . O my Jesus, give me strength : I desire to do something for you before I die. If I were now to die, how unhappy should I be ? You prolong my life, that I may become a saint. I desire to be perfect : I love you, O my God and my Spouse ; and I desire to love you as becomes your spouse. I wish to think only of pleasing you. Pardon me all the offences I have hitherto offered to you : I detest them with my whole heart. O God of my soul, to gratify myself I have insulted you, my treasure and my life, who have loved me so much. Assist me to give myself entirely to you from this day forward. Holy Virgin Mary, my hope, come to my aid, and obtain for me the grace to do something for God before the hour of my death.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.









